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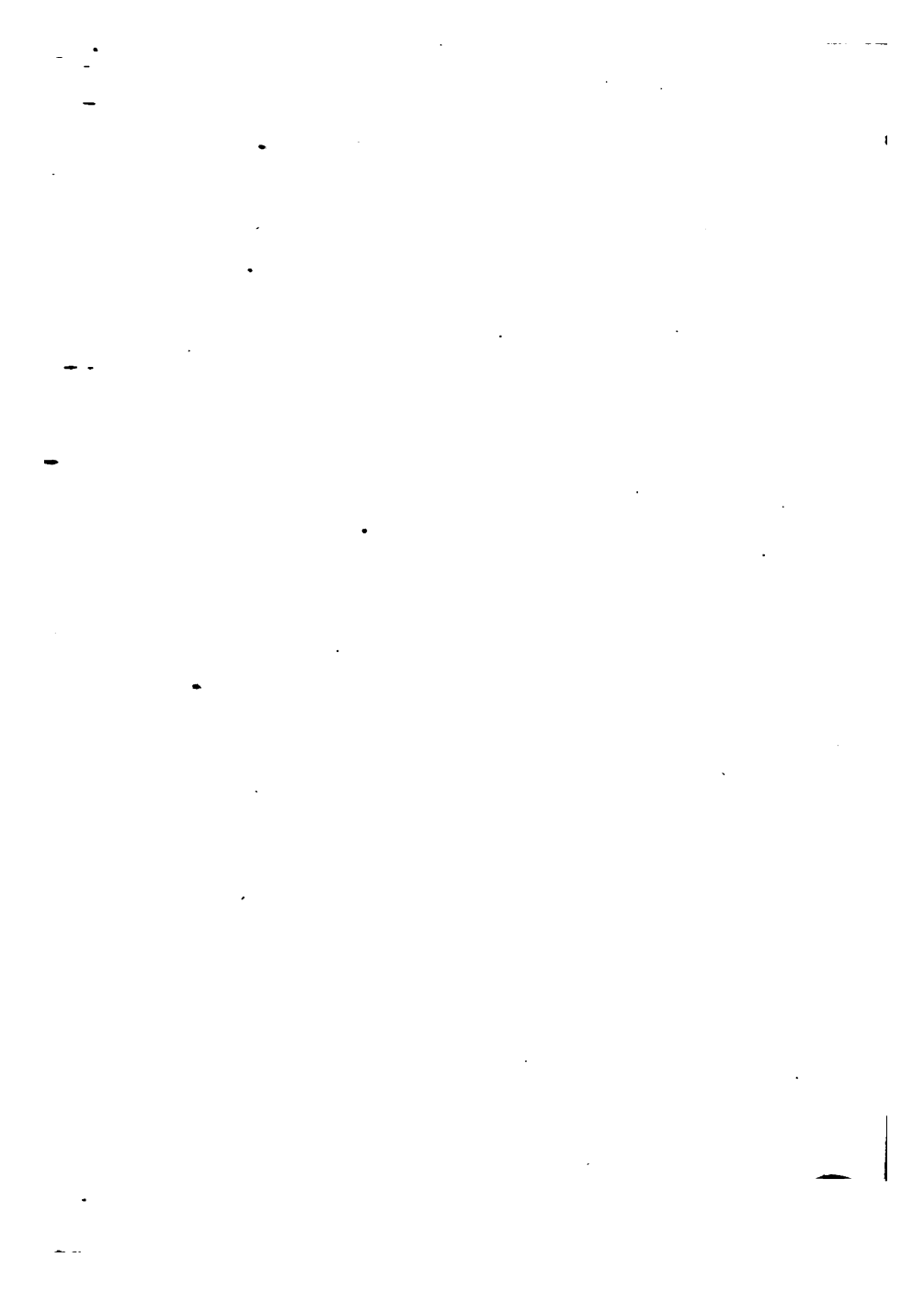
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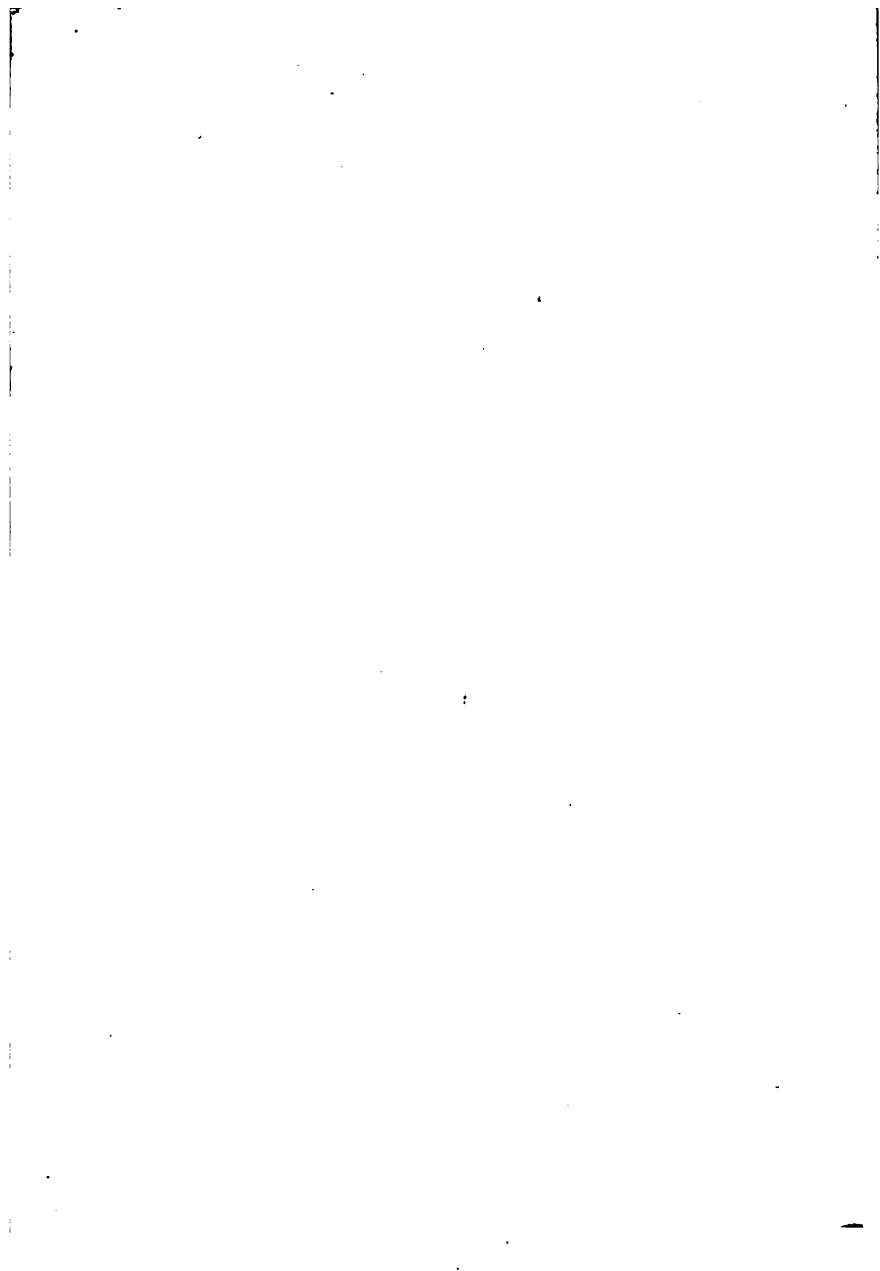
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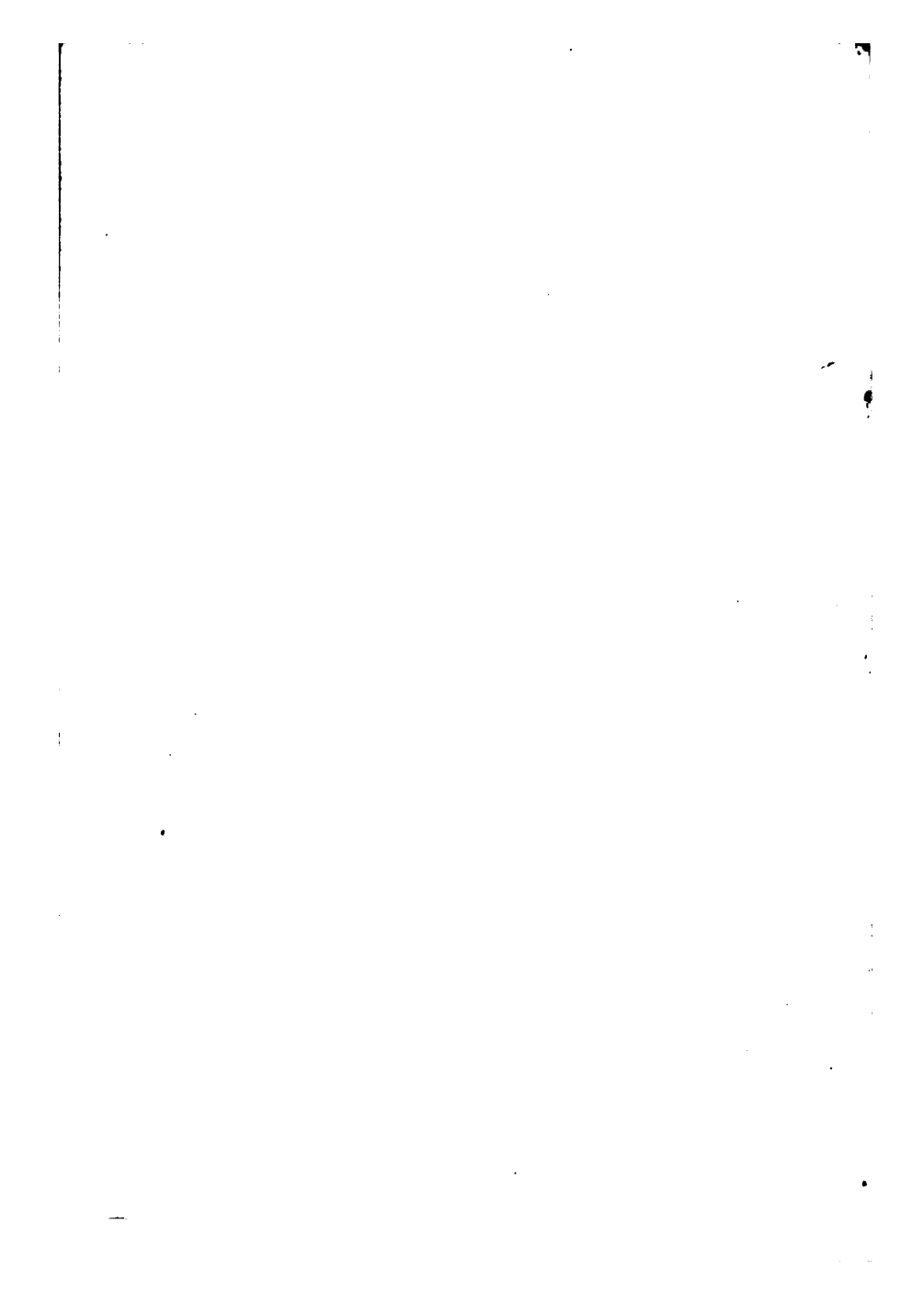






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HIS HOUSE IN ORDER



His House in Order

A Comedy
In Four Acts

By
ARTHUR W. PINERO

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His House in Order



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His House in Order

THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY

HILARY JESSON. [*British Minister to the Republic of Santa Guarda.*]

FILMER JESSON, M. P.

DEREK JESSON.

SIR DANIEL RIDGELEY.

PRYCE RIDGELEY.

MAJOR MAUREWARDE.

DR. DILNOTT.

HARDING.

FORSHAW. [*A representative of a provincial newspaper.*]

SERVANTS.

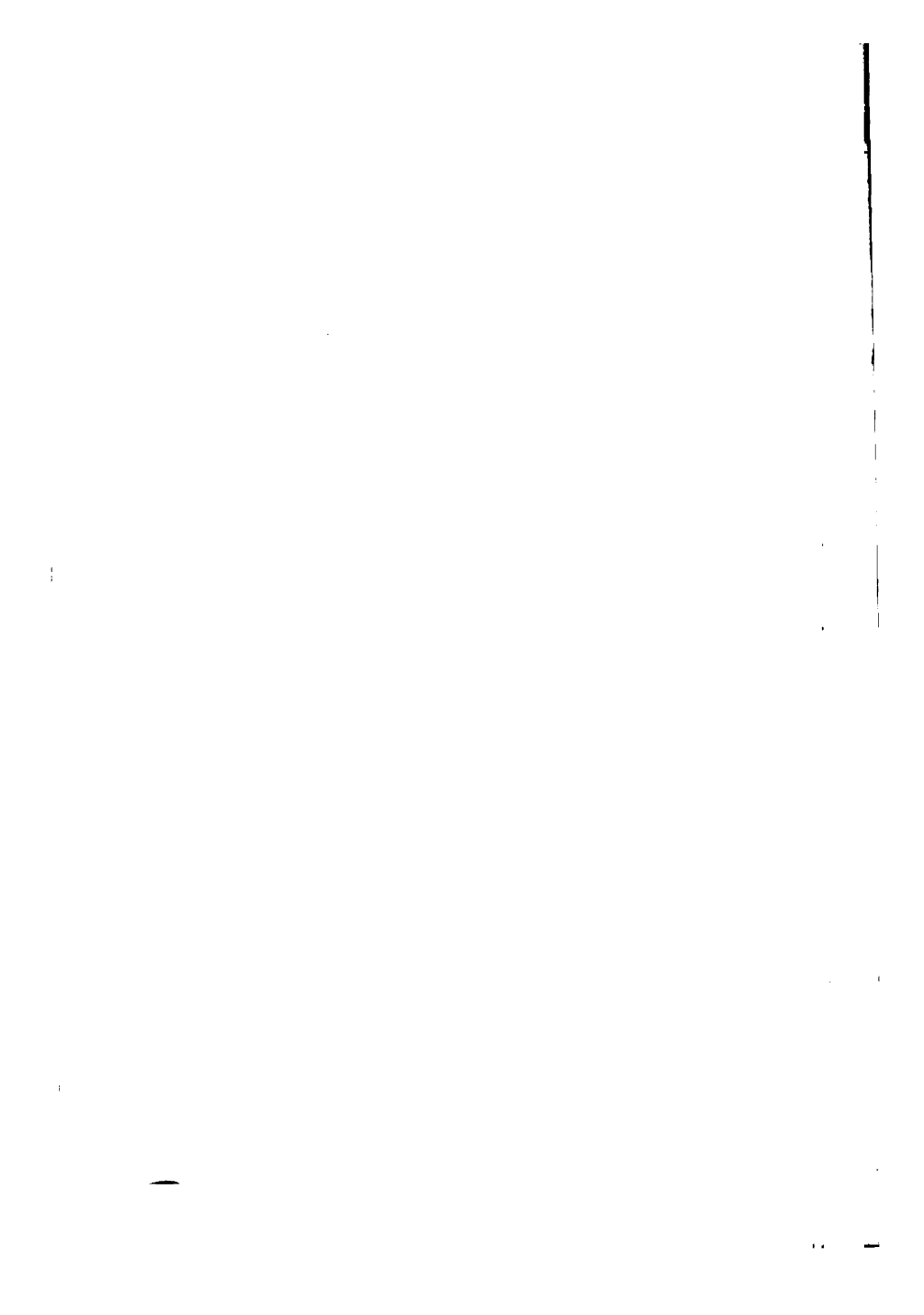
NINA.

LADY RIDGELEY.

GERALDINE RIDGELEY.

Mlle. THOMÉ.

The scene is laid at Overbury Towers, Mr. Filmer Jesson's country house on the outskirts of a town in the midlands. The action occurs during the Easter parliamentary recess, within the space of twenty-seven hours.



His House in Order

THE FIRST ACT

The scene represents a library in a country mansion. There is a door on the right, another on the left. A mullioned window set in a deep bay faces the spectator. To the left of this, another window, opening to the floor, gives access to a broad, stone-paved terrace. Beyond the terrace are the lawns and flower-gardens.

The walls are lined with bookcases. A large writing-table stands in the middle of the room; on its right is a writing-chair, on its left a chair of an ordinary kind. A heap of unopened letters lies upon the blotting-pad, and among the various objects upon the table are three miniatures. In the bay-window there is a capacious, high-backed chair and, by its side, a small table bearing a pile of Blue-books. On the left of the room is a settee covered with leather; on the right another settee of the same character. Close to these settees are other small tables laden with books and reviews; but, though there is evidence that the room is in use, everything appears to be strictly in its place.

The green in the garden is the fresh green of spring. The sun is shining brilliantly and the window on the left is open.

[NOTE:—Throughout, “Right” and “Left” are the spectators’ right and left, not the actor’s.]

[FORSHAW, a young man, is seated, gloved, upon the settee on the left, turning the leaves of a review. HARDING, another young man, enters at the door on the right.]

HARDING.

[Referring to a visiting-card.] Mr. Forshaw?

FORSHAW.

[Laying the review aside and rising.] Yes.

HARDING.

Good-morning. My name is Harding ; I am Mr. Jesson's secretary. [Shaking hands.] Mr. Jesson has gone to the station to meet his brother. He has asked me to receive you and show you round.

FORSHAW.

Much obliged. Perhaps I may have the honor of a talk with him personally by and by ?

HARDING.

[Dubiously.] He's rather full up.

FORSHAW.

My editor thought that if, in addition to an account of to-morrow's ceremony and a picturesque description of this place, we could give our readers a word or two direct from Mr. Jesson on the political situation —

HARDING.

H'm! I'll speak to him.

FORSHAW.

That's why they send me through a day in advance. You know, Mr. Harding, we reckon Mr. Filmer Jesson among the most promising of the younger men on our side.

HARDING.

[*Smiling.*] I won't challenge your estimate.

FORSHAW.

At the next turn of the wheel he's safe for an under-secretaryship, we consider, at the very least.

HARDING.

[*Evasively.*] In the meantime—to commence with this room—this, as you see, is the library. We are now in the old portion of the building.

FORSHAW.

Thanks. Before we go into that, do you mind explaining to me about the park—the park that's to be opened to-morrow?

HARDING.

Jesson Park.

FORSHAW.

In memory of his late wife, isn't it?

[*In response to a motion from HARDING, FORSHAW sits in the chair on the left of the writing-table. HARDING seats himself upon the settee on the right.*]

HARDING.

A memorial to the late Mrs. Jesson—yes.

FORSHAW.

[*Producing a bulky pocketbook.*] And she was—who was she?

HARDING.

A Miss Ridgeley—Miss Annabel Ridgeley, second daughter of Sir Daniel Ridgeley.

FORSHAW.

[*Scribbling with a pencil upon the back of a letter.*] Sir
Daniel R-i-d-g-e —

HARDING.

—l-e-y.

FORSHAW.

The large colliery owner?

HARDING.

Yes.

FORSHAW.

Mr. Jesson and Miss Ridgeley were married —?
Kind of you to help me if you can.

HARDING.

Delighted. Twelve years ago.

FORSHAW.

The lady died —?

HARDING.

To-morrow is the third anniversary.

FORSHAW.

[*Recalling the circumstance.*] Wasn't it a very sudden
affair?

HARDING.

Shocking.

FORSHAW.

Carriage accident.

HARDING.

[*With a nod.*] Horses bolted.

[HARDING rises and, going to the writing-table, takes up one of the miniatures and hands it to FORSHAW.]

FORSHAW.

[After a pause.] Sweet face.

HARDING.

A sweet woman.

FORSHAW.

Any children?

[HARDING takes another miniature from the table and exchanges it with FORSHAW for the first.]

HARDING.

A boy of eight.

FORSHAW.

Nice little kiddy.

HARDING.

Master Derek.

FORSHAW.

[Returning the miniature to HARDING and writing.] So the father makes a gift of Jesson Park to the town——?

HARDING.

As a token of gratitude for the nine years of happiness the mother brought him.

FORSHAW.

I suppose you've a big gathering for the occasion?

HARDING.

[Carefully replacing the miniatures.] Gathering?

FORSHAW.

House-party. It would be a great convenience to me to have the names of the guests.

HARDING.

With pleasure.

FORSHAW.

I undertake that nothing shall appear before Thursday.

HARDING.

Oh, my dear sir! [*Leaving the table.*] No, it's not a big gathering, by any means. The family merely. [*Walking away to the left.*] You can understand, Mr. Forshaw, that to-morrow's function, so far as this household is concerned, is hardly a gay business.

FORSHAW.

Naturally, naturally.

HARDING.

[*Sitting upon the settee on the left.*] The house-party? Mr. Hilary Jesson, Mr. Filmer's elder brother.

FORSHAW.

[*Writing.*] Mr. Hilary Jesson —

HARDING.

British Minister to Santa Guarda.

FORSHAW.

[*Writing.*] Santa Guarda.

HARDING.

Sir Daniel and Lady Ridgeley.

FORSHAW.

[*Writing.*] Late Mrs. Jesson's parents.

HARDING.

Mr. Pryce Ridgeley. Pryce with a Y.

FORSHAW.

Their son?

HARDING.

Their son. Miss Ridgeley, their surviving daughter.

FORSHAW.

[*Writing.*] Mr. Pryce Ridgeley—Miss Ridgeley —

HARDING.

Please don't describe her as a visitor, though. Miss Ridgeley is unselfish enough to devote herself to the management of Mr. Jesson's two establishments. [*Rising.*] That's all. Oh, I'm forgetting Major Maurewarde. Major Guy Maurewarde, D. S. O.

FORSHAW.

[*Writing.*] Relation?

HARDING.

Not actually; an old friend, exactly like one of themselves. M-a-u-r-e-w-a-r-d-e. Shall we look at the drawing rooms?

FORSHAW.

Certainly. [*Checking himself in the act of putting his pocketbook away.*] Wait a moment!

HARDING.

Eh?

FORSHAW.

I beg your pardon; I've made no note concerning—

HARDING.

What?

FORSHAW.

Excuse me—Mr. Filmer Jesson has married again!

HARDING.

Er—yes. Yes.

FORSHAW.

[*Reopening his pocketbook.*] Recently?

HARDING.

In the autumn.

FORSHAW.

May I —?

HARDING.

[*Impatiently.*] A Miss Graham.

FORSHAW.

[*Writing.*] Daughter of —?

HARDING.

A clergyman. Are you ready? [FORSHAW rises.]
Here is Mr. Jesson.

[FILMER enters at the door on the right. HILARY and GERALDINE follow, talking together. Both good-looking, the brothers are in marked contrast to each other. FILMER is a precise, old-young man of forty; HILARY, some six years his senior, a type of the genial, perennially-fresh cosmopolitan. GERALDINE, who carries a garden hat, is a handsome woman of thirty-seven with a chilling manner. A bunch of keys and a set of tablets hang from her waist.]

HARDING.

[*To FILMER.*] This is Mr. Forshaw, whose editor wrote to us yesterday.

FILMER.

[*Bowing to FORSHAW.*] How do you do?

HILARY.

[*To HARDING.*] Hallo, Harding!

[*HILARY and HARDING meet by the bay-window and shake hands warmly.*]

FILMER.

[*To FORSHAW.*] I hope Mr. Harding is showing you all you wish to see of the house.

FORSHAW.

We are just starting on our tour of inspection. I was wondering, Mr. Jesson, whether you would grant me a short conversation afterward.

FILMER.

Conversation?

FORSHAW.

My editor would much appreciate a few remarks from you on the political outlook.

FILMER.

[*Sadly.*] Ah, Mr. Forshaw, we are not thinking of politics here for the moment.

FORSHAW.

[*Persuasively.*] Still, a word or two, exclusively to my journal —

FILMER.

Well — [*To HARDING, who has left HILARY and is*

now waiting for FORSHAW at the door on the left.] Mr. Harding, I may join you and Mr. Forshaw in the grounds after you have been through the rooms.

FORSHAW.

Extremely good of you, sir—extremely.

[FORSHAW, *having bowed to* GERALDINE *and* HILARY, *withdraws with* HARDING.

FILMER.

What an ass Harding is, to let me in for this! But everything appears to be of a piece to-day. [*To* HILARY.] My dear fellow, I can't apologize to you sufficiently.

HILARY.

[*At a bookcase between the bay-window and the window on the left.*] You've re-bound your Macaulay, old boy.

FILMER.

[*To* GERALDINE.] Didn't Nina know at what hour my brother was to arrive?

GERALDINE.

[*With a slight shrug.*] Yes, she knew.

FILMER.

[*Sitting at the writing-table and opening his letters.*] And yet isn't on the spot to welcome him!

HILARY.

[*Turning, a volume in his hand.*] Why on earth should Mrs. Nina display the smallest anxiety to make my acquaintance? I deserve to be severely snubbed, for not coming home for your wedding.

GERALDINE.

[*Seated upon the settee on the right—to* FILMER.]

You will be grieved to hear, Filmer, that she has bought another litter of puppies from Mellish.

FILMER.

[*Leaning back in his chair.*] Another!

HILARY.

[*Eyeing GERALDINE.*] How I envy her! Dogs don't thrive in Santa Guarda.

FILMER.

We shall have more long faces from the gardeners, Geraldine.

GERALDINE.

There is where she differs so radically from poor Annabel. My sister was considerate of everybody.

FILMER.

Is Derek at his lessons?

GERALDINE.

No, I have released him from them this morning. I thought him looking pale. He is in the woods with Mademoiselle.

FILMER.

His uncle would like to see him.

HILARY.

[*Replacing the book.*] Indeed I should.

GERALDINE.

[*Rising.*] I'll find him.

HILARY.

No, no; please —

GERALDINE.

I am sure you and Filmer have a great deal to talk over.

[She goes out at the window on the left, and, passing the bay-window, disappears on the right.]

HILARY.

[With a playful shiver.] Ugh!

FILMER.

Are you cold! Shut the window.

HILARY.

I am warmer already. Oh, what wouldn't I give for the presence of Miss Ridgeley on some of our sultry days at Montiago! *[Throwing himself at full length upon the settee on the left.]* She is back again, Filmer?

FILMER.

[Ignoring the question.] May I glance at these letters?

HILARY.

Do. She gathered her skirts round her and left you, when you remarried, you wrote and told me.

FILMER.

I don't recollect putting it in that way. At any rate, I have been compelled to beg her to return.

HILARY.

Why? In the name of everything that is glacial, why?

FILMER.

To keep my house in order. She has method, system.

HILARY.

Resembling poor Annabel.

FILMER.

To some extent.

HILARY.

I assume, then, that "method" isn't included in Mrs. Nina's natural endowments?

FILMER.

It is not. [*With a sigh.*] It is not.

HILARY.

A charming person, nevertheless? Judging from the photograph of herself which she sent me, the gracious little message inscribed upon it——

FILMER.

[*Shortly.*] Oh, charming, charming.

[*He reads his letters, giving an ear to HILARY at the same time.*]

HILARY.

[*On his back, gazing at the ceiling.*] Don't you think, dear old chap, that a man is wrong ever to look for the special qualities of one woman in another? He is doomed to disappointment if he does so, the odds are a thousand *duros* to an *ochavo*. I don't want to be oracular—but do remember the immutable law of variety. Nature seldom condescends to replicas. You may roam the whole world, as I have, and you won't discover two noses that are absolutely a match—not even among our gallant friends, the Japanese. How much more striking is the diversity when you get under the skin, when you touch disposition, mood, talent! As for women, God bless 'em all, I say! One will sing sweetly—God bless her! Another hasn't a note in her voice, but plays the fiddle like Kubelik—God bless her! Another is a rattling good talker, or is literary, or horsey, or is at her best on the golf-links; or she is devoted to district-visiting and such

matters, or to fancy-work, or politics. Again, God bless 'em! But we are not justified, I maintain, in demanding that the woman who sings shall also play the fiddle, or that the fiddler shall be able to ride to hounds, or that either shall be remarkably proficient with her needle. No, you must take each for what she is, on her merits. You follow me?

FILMER.

I am following you.

HILARY.

Very well. Moral. Poor dear Annabel—I revere her memory; she controlled her household to perfection. That was where *she* excelled. Now, my new sister-in-law, you allow me to suspect, is totally devoid of any faculty of that sort.

FILMER.

Totally.

HILARY.

Totally. Do I blame her? Not a bit. God bless her! I'm for adaptability, old son.

FILMER.

Adaptability?

HILARY.

For the man adapting himself, in a measure, to circumstances—to the woman. Why is she always to adapt herself to *him*? There's the cause of half the woe, half the failure, in life. *That* for keeping house! If Mrs. Nina can't keep house to our taste, let us make the best, not the worst, of her deficiency; and seize upon the gifts she *does* possess, and appraise them at their full value, and thank heaven for them, and sympathize with them. As for sniffing at her; as for despising her for a useless

animal that has acquitted itself disgracefully between the shafts of the domestic cart——! *Voto al Diablo!* [*Improvising.*]

*If I had a little wife what wouldn't go,
Do you think I would wallop her? No, no, no!
I'd sack all my servants and live in hotels,
And spend my days gaily in ringin' the bells.*

Ha, ha, ha, ha!

FILMER.

[*Rising, with a faint smile.*] My dear Hilary, a diplomatic training hasn't cured you of your old vice of extravagance and exaggeration. [*HILARY laughs again.*] Pray don't imagine that I use the expression, "my house in order," in the limited sense you restrict it to. I assure you I am not referring solely to the petty details of mere housekeeping, either here or in Hill Street. The phrase comprises, in my mind, the regular, methodical conduct of life generally, social as well as domestic. When I ask that my house shall be in order, I am asking, not only that my luncheon, my dinner, shall be decently and punctually served; not only that this inkstand, this paper-knife, may be found invariably in the same place; but that every wheel of the mechanism of my private affairs, however minute, shall be duly oiled and preserved from grit. I am asking that the impressions of home and its surroundings formed by my son in boyhood shall be such as will influence him in after years to his mental and moral advantage; in short, that I may be permitted to pursue my public career in complete confidence that nothing—nothing—outside that career is liable to the slightest confusion and derangement. [*Sitting upon the settee on the right.*] That is what I intended to convey by "my house in order."

HILARY.

[*Bringing himself to a sitting posture.*] By Jove, Filmer, and a precious tall order, too, upon my soul!

FILMER.

Oh, if you can chaff——

HILARY.

Chaff! I'm in deadly earnest. But you haven't finished with my exaggerations?

FILMER.

Far from it. You imply that I "despise" Nina for her defects, and you compare me to the driver of a wretched animal in a barrow. If that isn't exaggeration, distortion, I've never met with it. Despise her, dear child! I am not so cowardly as to lay the consequences of my error at her door.

HILARY.

My illustration was perhaps a trifle discourteous—to Mrs. Nina.

FILMER.

Then, with regard to your suggestion that I expected to find in her the exceptional abilities of my first wife—of poor Annabel, there again you are wide of the mark. No, what I did was to persuade myself that I could engraft certain of Annabel's qualities upon Nina; that I could create in Nina a second nature, as it were. You know how I became interested in her?

HILARY.

Through old Threlfall.

FILMER.

Our old friend, Canon Threlfall, heard that Derek's governess was leaving me on account of ill-health, and implored me to give a trial to a young lady who had lost both her parents and was thrown upon her own resources; who was bright, clever, amiable, and so forth. I saw Miss Graham on several occasions and—well, the experi-

ment was made. Her unfitness for the task was soon evident. It was then the idea struck me —

HILARY.

Of transforming her into the pupil.

FILMER.

Yes.

HILARY.

Yourself into the tutor.

FILMER.

Exactly. It was an impulse. I can't defend it ; it was an impulse.

HILARY.

Impulses are risky things, after five-and-twenty.

FILMER.

They are for youth, you mean?

HILARY.

When they are often glorious. Middle-age, oh, my brother, must be content to be guided solely by reason.

FILMER.

You are right ; and old age by experience.

HILARY.

And, with it all, no man may reckon himself safe till he is in his grave.

FILMER.

[*Rising and advancing to* HILARY.] But that *I* should have committed this egregious blunder, Hilary !

HILARY.

The heel of Achilles, what !

FILMER.

Blunder! a mild word for it. [*Sitting beside HILARY.*] I have been cruelly unjust all round, I fear—unjust to Annabel's memory, unjust to Derek, unjust to Nina herself.

HILARY.

To the poor little fish-out-of-water. And she has proved quite unreceptive, has Mrs. Nina? Quite?

FILMER.

Utterly. Petted, spoiled, undisciplined; the playmate from babyhood of a foolish, indulgent father—oh, utterly.

HILARY.

[*Thoughtfully.*] Yes; that's the sort of father—if I were left alone in the world with a baby—that's the sort of father I should be.

FILMER.

Of course, I don't assert for one moment that she is without certain natural gifts —

HILARY.

Aha! You concede that to the exaggerator!

FILMER.

Willingly—gifts which to many husbands would be attractive and satisfying. Unfortunately they are not of the smallest service to her in her present position—in what I hoped *might* have been her position. [*Heavily.*] Could any prospect be more unpromising?

HILARY.

None; unless you adopt the policy I commend to you.

FILMER.

Adaptability! Ah, it's mighty fine for you—a bach-

elior, with an easy temperament—to talk in that strain. I tell you it is impossible for a man of my settled habits and principles to accommodate himself to a giddy, heedless, wayward girl such as, I regret to say, Nina shows herself to be. [*Starting up.*] The notion is absurd, preposterous! [*Walking away to the bay-window and looking out on to the terrace.*] No, all I can do I have done.

HILARY.

[*Rising.*] Summoned the frigid Geraldine.

FILMER.

Relieved Nina of responsibilities she is incapable of discharging.

HILARY.

[*Dryly.*] Meanwhile, my new sister-in-law is amusing herself at the kennels with her puppy-dogs?

FILMER.

Encouraging them to wreck the flower-beds, most probably. My boy ——!

[*He goes to the window on the left and receives DEREK who enters with GERALDINE and Mlle. THOMÉ. DEREK is a serious, wise-looking child of delicate physique, Mlle. THOMÉ a lady of thirty with a pleasing appearance and a subdued vivacity.*]

FILMER.

Come along, Derek! [*Leading him toward HILARY.*] Uncle Hilary wants to see what a tremendous fellow you have grown.

HILARY.

[*On the right.*] Hallo, youngster! And how are you?

DEREK.

[*Removing his cap and shaking hands with HILARY.*]

How do you do? I hope you have had a pleasant journey.

HILARY.

Very. Too old for kissing, eh?

DEREK.

Yes, I've given up kissing gentlemen.

HILARY.

Oh, you've given up kissing gentlemen, have you?

DEREK.

Except Maurry.

HILARY.

Except Maurry?

GERALDINE.

You should say Major Maurewarde in speaking of him, Derek.

DEREK.

Major Maurewarde.

HILARY.

[*Sitting upon the settee on the right and drawing DEREK to him.*] And why should Major Maurewarde be so privileged?

DEREK.

Oh, he's my great chum, you know.

HILARY.

Ah! He's your great chum, is he?

DEREK.

My man-chum. He's coming down this afternoon, to

sleep the night and help us to open the gates of mama's park to-morrow.

HILARY.

So I am glad to hear from father.

DEREK.

Why, have you ever come into contract with him?

GERALDINE.

Not contract—contact.

FILMER.

Derek, Derek!

MLLE. THOMÉ.

[*On the left.*] Contact, contact, contact! *A quoi pensez-vous donc!*

DEREK.

Contact.

HILARY.

Yes; Major Maurewarde is a chum of mine, too. He was *my* chum before you were born, Derek. [*Placing his hand upon DEREK's heart.*] And you've no room in there for more than one man-chum at a time?

DEREK.

I'd prefer not to have another, thank you. [*Pointing to MLLE. THOMÉ.*] Mam'selle Thomé is my lady-chum.

GERALDINE.

Don't point, child. Never point.

MLLE. THOMÉ.

You forget, Dereek. I correct you dis vairy morning ven you point at de ship.

DEREK.

[To Mlle. Thomé.] Sheep—not ship.

Mlle. Thomé.

Sheep.

DEREK.

[To Hilary.] But I haven't known Mam'selle nearly as long as I've known Maurry. Directly he arrives, I'll lend her to you, if you like. [Hilary laughs.]

Mlle. Thomé.

Dereek!

GERALDINE.

That will suffice, Derek.

FILMER.

[Resuming his seat at the writing-table.] Hush, my boy, hush!

HILARY.

[To Derek.] *Je t'en rends mille grâces. Si Mademoiselle veut bien me faire l'honneur de m'accepter comme ton remplaçant pendant ma petite visite —*

Mlle. Thomé.

[Laughing gaily.] Ha, ha, ha, ha!

GERALDINE.

[Severely.] Mademoiselle —!

Mlle. Thomé.

J'en suis désolée, Mees Geraldine.

GERALDINE.

[Opening her tablets and seating herself on the left of the writing-table, facing Filmer.] Can you spare me a moment, Filmer?

FILMER.

[To HILARY.] Excuse me.

[GERALDINE and FILMER consult in undertones.

DEREK.

[Gravely imitating HILARY.] *Si Mam'selle veut bien—me faire—l'honneur—* [Turning to Mlle. THOMÉ.] What do you think of my uncle's accent, Mam'selle?

Mlle. THOMÉ.

Mais excellent! Monsieur n'est-il pas un diplomate distingué? Eet ees pairfect?

DEREK.

[Dubiously.] So you say. May I introduce him to you? [Presenting HILARY, who rises promptly, to Mlle. THOMÉ.] My uncle Hilary—Mam'selle Berthe Thomé.

GERALDINE.

[Looking round.] Mademoiselle Thomé—Mr. Jackson —

Mlle. THOMÉ.

[To HILARY.] *Je suis très honorée, monsieur.*

DEREK.

[To HILARY.] You will be able to polish up your French with her while you are here, won't you? [Going to Mlle. THOMÉ.] Mam'selle Thomé is the most satisfactory governess I have ever had.

GERALDINE.

[Over her shoulder.] It affords me great pleasure to subscribe to that.

Mlle. THOMÉ.

[Embracing DEREK—softly.] *Mon petit chéri!*

DEREK.

Nina was just the reverse.

HILARY.

[*Who has followed Derek.*] Hey!

DEREK.

Nina was just the opposite.

HILARY.

Who?

DEREK.

My stepmother. She muddled me dreadfully when *she* was my governess.

GERALDINE.

Ah!

FILMER.

Silence, Derek, silence!

GERALDINE.

[*To Mlle. Thomé.*] Mademoiselle, Derek will join you in a minute or two on the terrace.

Mlle. Thomé.

[*Meekly.*] I will wait for 'im.

[*Mlle. Thomé. goes out on to the terrace, where she is seen at intervals walking up and down.*]

GERALDINE.

[*To Filmer, with a half sigh, half groan.*] Oh!

FILMER.

[*Irritably.*] Well, well, well! about the carriages. The roans must do the journey to the station twice, that's all.

HILARY.

[*Seated upon the settee on the left with DEREK beside him—to the boy.*] And would you have recognized your aged uncle, Derek, if you hadn't been prepared to meet him?

DEREK.

I believe I should.

HILARY.

Good!

DEREK.

You're not aged; only a little *passé*.

HILARY.

Ho, ho, ho——! [*Putting his fingers to his lips.*] Sssh

GERALDINE.

[*To FILMER.*] I've a memorandum here—my brother Pryce wishes us to change the locality of his bedroom.

FILMER.

Again?

GERALDINE.

The satin-wood furniture in the room he last slept in gave him a sensation of biliousness.

FILMER.

There's the blue room—mahogany.

GERALDINE.

Its aspect has never agreed with him.

FILMER.

What else is there, likely to please him?

GERALDINE.

The oak chamber is restful. If I might shift Major Maurewarde ——

FILMER.

Guy has been in possession of it for years.

GERALDINE.

A soldier —

FILMER.

Yes, I don't suppose he'd care. [GERALDINE rises.]
Anyhow, we must study Pryce's comfort.

GERALDINE.

Oh, there is one other matter. Talking of rooms and their aspect, Filmer, Dr. Watson thoroughly agrees with me that Derek's schoolroom at the Towers is not at all suitable for the purpose.

FILMER.

Really?

GERALDINE.

It has a westerly lookout, which means that the sun doesn't enter it till the boy has closed his books for the day.

FILMER.

[Rising.] Perfectly true.

GERALDINE.

[Looking at DEREK.] No wonder he is peaky.

DEREK.

I feel remarkably well, aunt.

GERALDINE.

Don't interrupt, Derek. Never interrupt.

FILMER.

What do you propose?

GERALDINE.

I shall startle you by my suggestion, perhaps. I propose that we give Derek poor Annabel's boudoir.

FILMER.

[*In a low voice.*] Annabel's boudoir?

GERALDINE.

Facing east and south; nothing could be better in that respect.

FILMER.

No, but—[*sitting upon the settle on the right.*] Annabel's room.

GERALDINE.

It is three years ago—three years to-morrow —

FILMER.

[*Hastily.*] Yes, yes.

GERALDINE.

And it seems to me not inappropriate —

FILMER.

Do you ever go into it?

GERALDINE.

[*Fingering one of the keys upon her bunch.*] Regularly, when we are here. Very often I send the housekeeper away and sit there, myself, while the maids sweep and dust. It is precisely as it was when she last walked out of it.

FILMER.

[*After a pause, quietly.*] Derek. [DEREK goes to FILMER. HILARY rises and retires to the bay-window where he sits with his back to those in the room.] What do you say to Aunt Geraldine's plan?

DEREK.

I should love to do my lessons in *mama's* room.
[*Loosening his collar.*] May I?

GERALDINE.

Don't fidget with your collar, Derek.

FILMER.

[*To GERALDINE.*] So we open the park and her boudoir —

GERALDINE.

[*Sitting upon the settee on the left.*] On the same date.
I had that in my mind.

FILMER.

[*Suddenly.*] Oh, but—stay—

GERALDINE.

Eh?

FILMER.

[*Rising and advancing to GERALDINE.*] I am afraid,
Geraldine, that we shall vex Nina seriously by doing this.

GERALDINE.

[*Elevating her brows.*] Vex Nina?

FILMER.

Make her exceedingly angry.

GERALDINE.

Because we don't place the room at her disposal?

FILMER.

She has repeatedly asked us to grant her the use of it.

GERALDINE.

To turn it into a dog-kennel!

FILMER.

[*Glancing at DEREK.*] Sssh! [*Lowering his voice.*] No, no, no; let us guard against the faintest suspicion of unfairness. She consents to the dogs being kept strictly out of doors for the future; she pledged her word to that effect last week, solemnly.

GERALDINE.

Filmer, I would rather the room remained locked up till doomsday. I couldn't bear to see poor Bel's *sanctum* contemptuously treated.

FILMER.

[*In protest.*] Ah, no!

GERALDINE.

Littered with trumpery literature and light music! A box of cigarettes on the mantelpiece; the carpet smothered with tobacco-ash! [*Rising.*] I couldn't endure the sight.

FILMER.

You advocate converting it into a schoolroom.

GERALDINE.

For her child. Besides, Derek has all the orderliness of his mother, thank God! [*Passing FILMER and seating herself upon the settee on the right.*] Derek, [*taking the boy's hands in hers*] you must promise to respect everything in your new schoolroom; you must promise faithfully.

DEREK.

Yes, aunt.

FILMER.

[*Going to them and standing over the boy with an uplifted finger.*] To reverence every object it contains, large or small!

DEREK.

Yes, father.

GERALDINE AND FILMER.

You promise!

DEREK.

I promise.

GERALDINE.

Thank you, Filmer. [*Making a note upon her tablets.*]
It is what my sister would have desired.

MLLE. THOMÉ.

[*Looking in at the window on the left.*] Mees Geraldine! Mees Geraldine! Dereek's *médecine*—'is tonique! 'E take it 'alf an hour before lunch.

GERALDINE.

[*Rising and pushing DEREK before her.*] Ah! You should have reminded me, Derek. Mademoiselle! MLLE. THOMÉ. *enters the room.*] A tablespoonful with one of water.

MLLE. THOMÉ.

[*Seizing DEREK by the arm.*] And a clofe afterward, not to be swallowed. *Allons! venez donc, mon ami. Vite, vite!*

[*MLLE. THOMÉ and DEREK depart, at the door on the left, as HARDING and FORSHAW, wearing their hats, appear on the terrace, entering from the right.*]

FILMER.

The pressman. [*Going to the open window.*] I'll get rid of him.

GERALDINE.

[*Picking up DEREK's cap, which the boy has left behind*]

him, and following FILMER.] Be careful. Put this on your head.

FILMER.

[*Taking the cap.*] How thoughtful you are, Geraldine !
[*Joining the men on the terrace.*] Well, Harding, and have you shown this gentleman the house ?

FORSHAW.

Beautiful place you have here, Mr. Jesson—beautiful.

FILMER.

We try to preserve its simplicity, and simplicity has a beauty of its own undoubtedly.

[*GERALDINE, unmindful of HILARY, who is ensconced in the chair in the bay-window, goes out quickly at the door on the right. HILARY, finding he is alone, rises and leaves the window as FILMER, FORSHAW, and HARDING move away to the left and pass out of sight.*

FILMER.

[*Walking with FORSHAW.*] And now, Mr.—er—ah—

HARDING.

[*Bringing up the rear.*] Forshaw.

FILMER.

Mr. Forshaw—now for our brief talk. Where shall we begin, eh ?

FORSHAW.

I leave that to you, Mr. Jesson.

FILMER.

With a glance at Mr. Tresorier's decided change of front ? I can place no other construction upon his recent utterances at Plymouth—

[*The sound of FILMER'S voice dies in the distance.*

HILARY has seated himself upon the settee on the right, and, with knitted brows, is staring at the carpet.

HILARY.

[*To himself.*] Phew—w—w!

[NINA runs along the terrace, from the right, and, after pausing to peep through the bay-window, presents herself breathlessly at the window on the left. She is a pretty, girlish young woman with an air of subjection, but with eyes full of rebellion. Her hat hangs from her neck by its strings, and the skirt of her dress is shortened by being carelessly pinned up. HILARY rises.

NINA.

I—I am so sorry.

HILARY.

For what?

NINA.

I ought to have been in the hall to greet you. [*Slowly advancing.*] I know who you are.

HILARY.

It is a great pleasure to me to meet you at last.

NINA.

[*Brushing one hand against the other.*] I'm doggy.

HILARY.

Don't mention it.

NINA.

[*Rubbing her hand upon her skirt.*] The pups have torn my handkerchief to ribbons. [*Giving him her hand.*] Is Filmer furious with me?

HILARY.

N—n—no.

NINA.

[*Sceptically.*] Ha! You see, when I get with my dogs—oh!—[*Unpinning her skirt and carelessly dropping the pins upon the carpet.*] There's such an appalling fuss if I bring dust into the house. [Seeing that he is picking up the pins.] I beg your pardon. [Regarding him with distrust.] That's like Filmer. Of course; you're brothers.

HILARY.

No, we're not; not in habits of neatness. [Sticking the pins in a cushion which is on the writing-table.] We won't let him find 'em on the floor, though, will we?

[Having untied the strings, she tosses her hat in the direction of the table on the left. It misses its mark; whereupon he passes her, picks up the hat, and lays it on the table.]

NINA.

Thank you, Mr. Jesson.

HILARY.

I say, look here! Life is short. Where's the good of wasting time?

NINA.

Wasting time?

HILARY.

We're relatives. We should get there sooner or later. My name's Hilary; yours is Nina.

NINA.

Oh, I—I am agreeable. [He approaches her.] You are not a stickler for formalities, then, either?

HILARY.

I! Lord, no!

NINA.

[*Drawing back.*] Ah, but you won't leave me to bear the brunt of it, if they come down on me sharply for undue familiarity?

HILARY.

[*Looking at her fixedly.*] If they come down on you in my presence, I—[*checking himself*] I'll make a diversion—a joke —

NINA.

[*With a twist of the mouth.*] Joke!

HILARY.

What, isn't there much joking at the Towers, or in Hill Street, as a rule?

NINA.

[*Glancing at him out of the corners of her eyes.*] You wait.

HILARY.

Come, what'll you bet we are not a fairly cheerful family party while I am here?

NINA.

Bet? Oh, I'll bet— [Changing her tone—wistfully.] How long are you home for, Hilary?

HILARY.

Six weeks.

NINA.

Six—weeks —

HILARY.

I'll hunt you up, when we are all in town, pretty constantly, shall I?

NINA.

I should—be glad —

HILARY.

Are you fond of the opera?

NINA.

[*Staring at him.*] Y—y—yes.

HILARY.

Then there are the pictures, and Ranelagh, and the restaurants. *Somebody's* got to take me out and about. Will you?

NINA.

Oh, if you—if you —

[*Her eyes overflow and she turns from him abruptly, dashing her tears away with the back of her hand. He sits in the chair on the left of the writing-table, twisting a paper-knife.*]

NINA.

[*Recovering herself.*] You and Filmer have had a nice, quiet talk together, I suppose?

HILARY.

We've had a talk.

NINA.

[*Sitting upon the settee on the right.*] You've heard I'm a failure?

HILARY.

These are early days —

NINA.

No, no, no ; I'm an out-and-out, hideous failure. I've been tried and condemned. They've pronounced me hopelessly incompetent, and sentenced me to take a back seat.

HILARY.

It's not a life sentence.

NINA.

How can it be anything else ? Filmer will never alter ; he'll always be the same—always *has* been, I expect ? —

HILARY.

More or less, I admit. But you—you're a vastly different pair of shoes. Old Filmer's forty, and incurable perhaps ; you—you're neither.

NINA.

Twenty-six, I am.

HILARY.

A girl—a chit—a brat—comparatively. [*Tenderly.*] And therefore, my dear Nina, my dear little sister-in-law —

NINA.

Oh, don't — !

HILARY.

Eh ?

NINA.

[*Rising.*] In six weeks you'll be gone. [*Advancing to him.*] You're right, I'm still young—young enough to learn, and to grow into other people's ways. And I *could* have learned—I had the will to—[*drawing a deep breath*] if the conditions had been favorable.

HILARY.

Conditions?

NINA.

[*Slowly.*] If there had been no one before me.

HILARY.

You're alluding to ——?

NINA.

His first wife.

HILARY.

Annabel.

NINA.

The perfect first wife. I didn't take her into my calculations when I accepted Filmer. Honestly, from your point of view, was she the paragon they say she was?

HILARY.

[*Quietly.*] I can find no fault in her, Nina.

NINA.

Nobody can! nobody will! And now you—you join in the chorus. [*Seating herself, facing him, at the writing-table and taking up the miniature of ANNABEL.*] Fair, wasn't she?

HILARY.

Yes.

NINA.

Willow?

HILARY.

Yes.

NINA.

A soft voice?

HILARY.

Her gentleness was her strength. She ruled by it.

NINA.

Slightly different from her horrid sister.

HILARY.

Had she a horrid sister?

NINA.

I mean Geraldine.

HILARY.

[Politely.] Do you!

NINA.

[Snatching at a miniature of herself.] Oh, isn't it ridiculous for a man to have the portraits of two wives stuck in front of him! *[Replacing ANNABEL'S miniature and rising.]* I'll relieve him of mine.

HILARY.

[Rising.] Nina —

NINA.

He'll be delighted to be rid of it.

HILARY.

[Firmly.] Put that down, Nina.

NINA.

It's on his table merely as a matter of form.

HILARY.

Put it down at once.

[She obeys HILARY sullenly, and they resume their seats.]

HILARY.

[*Breaking an embarrassing silence.*] You must show me your dogs this afternoon. What's their breed?

NINA.

[*Her foot tapping the floor.*] Thank you ; they won't interest you.

HILARY.

I beg your pardon ; they will, greatly.

NINA.

They are *my* pets ; they didn't belong to the first Mrs. Filmer.

HILARY.

Nina, Nina, Nina —— !

NINA.

And I've no desire to go to the opera, Mr. Jesson, or to Ranelagh, or anywhere.

HILARY.

And I have traveled over nine thousand miles ——

NINA.

[*Sharply.*] Not to see me.

HILARY.

Indeed ?

NINA.

[*Leaning forward, her elbows on the table.*] No—to be present at the opening of this park to-morrow. You must think me simple.

HILARY.

I assure you that the opening of the park alone would not have brought me home.

NINA.

It would have been kinder, at any rate, if your visit hadn't coincided with to-morrow's ceremony.

HILARY.

Kinder?

NINA.

More complimentary to *me*. Isn't the whole affair a fresh humiliation for me?

HILARY.

Humiliation?

NINA.

Isn't it! Jesson Park! Dedicated to the memory of Annabel Mary, for nine years the devoted wife and help-mate of Filmer Jesson, member of parliament for the southern division of this county! And I am to stand by, dressed in half-mourning, while Filmer makes a speech from a purple platform—he is always ready to make a speech!—while Filmer makes a pompously pathetic speech in praise of Annabel Mary, Annabel Mary, Annabel Mary!

HILARY.

[*Soothingly.*] Ssh, ssh, ssh! There is no intention to humiliate, to affront. We should estimate a word or action by its intention. Recollect that the park was promised three years ago, in the first flood of poor old Filmer's grief. The bill happens to fall due at this moment, yes——

NINA.

Oh, he couldn't back out of it now, I own. But to include me in the public parade, to exhibit me to the townsfolk——! [*Pushing her chair back and starting up.*] How they'll grin at me when he is holding forth

about the virtues of my predecessor! [*Pacing the room.*] Even these people have a certain sense of coarse fun! Won't the women look down their noses, and the men nudge each other!

HILARY.

[*Rising.*] Ah, you do them an injustice. They will see only your generosity, your nobility.

NINA.

They will see only the comic side of the thing. It is comic. Filmer hasn't the humor of a fly; it's comic. [*Sitting upon the settee on the left.*] And I am to be the laughing-stock—the butt——!

HILARY.

[*Standing behind the settee and placing his hands lightly upon her shoulders.*] Come, come, come, come!

NINA.

And then, the old Ridgeleys are to be here—the two old Ridgeleys, and Pryce——!

HILARY.

Well?

NINA.

To patronize me, snub me, sneer at me—or ignore me.

HILARY.

Not they.

NINA.

They do, continually, here and in London. They're worse than Geraldine.

HILARY.

Mr. Pryce Ridgeley, I agree——

NINA.

They're more odious than Geraldine. [*Rising, and partly kneeling upon the settee.*] Forgive me for being rude to you. I was a beast to be rude to you. Hilary, these Ridgeleys —

HILARY.

Yes?

NINA.

[*Grasping the lapel of his coat.*] They drive me mad. It isn't the one that's dead and gone that I hate; believe me it isn't she, really.

HILARY.

I do believe you. You are not capable of that, my little friend.

NINA.

It's the others—Geraldine and the rest. Hilary, they —they—oh —!

HILARY.

What—what —?

NINA.

Sometimes they make me feel positively wicked —

[*A gong sounds in the distance. She shrinks as if at the crack of a whip, and her manner changes.*]

HILARY.

[*Looking at his watch.*] Hallo! Luncheon?

NINA.

[*Leaving the settee and moving away on tiptoe.*] No; ten minutes' warning. [*In a whisper.*] It's for me—to wash my face and put myself tidy. [*Nodding.*] Good-bye.

[She goes out at the door on the right. Observing that she has forgotten her hat, he picks it up and, carrying it behind him, follows her slowly and thoughtfully.]

END OF THE FIRST ACT

THE SECOND ACT

The scene is a drawing-room—a vast apartment with paneled walls against which stiff-looking chairs are placed at regular intervals. In the wall on the right, a considerable distance apart, are two handsome doors. On the left is the fireplace, and on the further side of the fireplace—but set out into the room—are a settee and an armchair with a small table between them. At the extreme left, on the side of the fireplace nearer the spectator, is another armchair. Behind the settee stand a grand piano and music-stool, and, by the side of the piano, two smaller chairs. In the centre of the room there is a large, heavy, circular table. On the right and left of this table is a chair; another—an armchair—in front of it. Some books of views lie upon the table; also, neatly folded and arranged, the leading London evening newspapers. On the right of the room, opposite the fireplace, a massive, oblong writing-table faces the spectator obliquely. Behind the table is a writing-chair, in front of it a settee, and on the right and left of the settee an armchair. Another settee stands, facing the piano, on the left of the writing-table.

The room is lighted by candelabra attached to the walls. A fire is burning.

[*LADY RIDGELEY, an elderly dame with hair arranged in the severest mid-Victorian fashion, occupies the settee by the fire. Near her, in the armchair, is GERALDINE. DEREK, seated*

at the round table, is looking through a book of views; M^{LL}E. THOMÉ is at the piano, playing a nocturne of Chopin; NINA sits, apart from the others, in a chair on the right. The ladies are in dinner-gowns of sombre colors. Two men-servants move quietly about the room collecting the after-dinner coffee cups. As they withdraw at the further door, the music becomes spirited and passionate.

LADY RIDGELEY.

Geraldine.

GERALDINE.

Yes, mother?

LADY RIDGELEY.

Ask that lady to stop.

GERALDINE.

[To M^{LL}E. THOMÉ.] Mademoiselle! [Rising.] Mademoiselle! [M^{LL}E. THOMÉ stops playing.] My mother has a strong dislike for music of that class.

M^{LL}E. THOMÉ.

[Carried away by her feelings.] Of zat class! Ect ees Chopin!

GERALDINE.

I've no doubt.

M^{LL}E. THOMÉ.

I play 'im badly, vairy badly, ah, yes. [Rising and coming to LADY RIDGELEY.] But Chopin! [Volubly.] So artistique, so romantique, so inspiré! *D'une invention merveilleuse, d'une fantaisie féconde, prolifique, inépuisable pour les ressources!*

GERALDINE.

[*At the piano, examining the music.*] Mademoiselle —

MLLE. THOMÉ.

'E appeal to natures zat are refined, *délicates—du goût le plus recherché*. Particularly is 'e for zose who 'ave suffered ze pangs of love and sorrow.

GERALDINE.

Mademoiselle Thomé!

MLLE. THOMÉ.

In fact, 'e ees a gr—r—reat, gr—r—reat genius!

NINA.

[*Who has risen.*] It's entirely my fault, Geraldine. I asked her to play Chopin. [*Touching MLLE. THOMÉ's arm.*] Thank you.

LADY RIDGELEY.

[*Freely.*] Thank you, Mrs. Jesson. To say the least—and to say it in homely English—such stuff is singularly out of keeping with the occasion which brings us together.

MLLE. THOMÉ.

[*Regaining her humility.*] Ah, I do not always reflect.

LADY RIDGELEY.

As to whether the composer was or was not a genius —

NINA.

Oh, but he *was*!

GERALDINE.

Nina!

LADY RIDGELEY.

I venture the opinion that much of the world's wickedness is attributable to its geniuses.

MLLE. THOMÉ.

[*Hypocritically.*] *Hélas ! c'est vrai !*

LADY RIDGELEY.

We could get on exceedingly well without them. And so far as sorrow is concerned, Miss Tomy, I claim to have experienced, under providence, as large a share as falls to most people. But it is not to a musician and a pianoforte that I turn for healing and consolation. [*Facing the fire.*] I thank *both* you ladies.

MLLE. THOMÉ.

[*To NINA, in a whisper.*] I put my foot in eet. [*Going to DEREK.*] Vat you find to interest you, Dereek?

DEREK.

Aren't these pictures of cathedrals jolly, Mam'selle?

GERALDINE.

Not jolly, Derek. A view of a cathedral can scarcely be jolly.

DEREK.

Nina calls things jolly. I mean nice.

[*LADY RIDGELEY and GERALDINE frown at NINA, who, with a weary shrug, sits upon the settee beside the writing-table.*]

LADY RIDGELEY.

Geraldine, isn't it high time that boy went to bed?

DEREK.

[*Loudly.*] Oh, no !

GERALDINE.

[*To DEREK.*] Hush!

LADY RIDGELEY.

[*Grimly.*] We shall have *him* becoming a genius, if we are not careful.

DEREK.

[*Getting off his chair.*] Please, grandma! please, Aunt Geraldine! Don't send me up-stairs till Maurry leaves the dining-room.

GERALDINE.

Major Maurewarde has seen quite enough of you for to-night, Derek. [*Moving to the fireplace.*] You have already far exceeded your hour.

DEREK.

Five minutes more! He promised me he'd only smoke a cigarette.

LADY RIDGELEY.

The child's fondness for Major Maurewarde is extraordinary.

DEREK.

[*Approaching* LADY RIDGELEY.] I'm not fonder of Maurry than Maurry is of me.

GERALDINE.

[*Raising a finger.*] That is arguing, Derek.

LADY RIDGELEY.

[*To DEREK.*] Your grandfather and your Uncle Pryce are fond of you; you don't hang on to *their* coattails.
[*To GERALDINE.*] *What* is the Major's nickname at his clubs, Geraldine?

GERALDINE.

[*Glancing from DEREK to LADY RIDGELEY warningly.*]
Never mind now, mother.

DEREK.

[*Promptly.*] "Sulks" Maurewarde.

LADY RIDGELEY.

"Sulks" Maurewarde?

DEREK.

Maurry has told me about that.

LADY RIDGELEY.

[*To GERALDINE.*] Odd.

DEREK.

They've christened Maurry "sulks" because he doesn't care for laughing and joking and being noisy any longer. It's a shame of them! When we are out walking, he often squeezes my hand tight and asks me not to speak to him for a little while.

GERALDINE.

Squeezes your hand tightly.

DEREK.

Tightly. [*Seating himself in the chair by LADY RIDGELEY.*] But that's not sulks; that's the art of talking in silence, Maurry says. You see, grandma, the men at the club don't understand Maurry as I do.

LADY RIDGELEY.

Good gracious!

GERALDINE.

[*To LADY RIDGELEY.*] Maurewarde has altered of late years. I think he felt our loss very deeply.

LADY RIDGELEY.

A man doesn't carry the weight of other people's losses about with him to that extent.

GERALDINE.

[*Sitting in the chair on the extreme left.*] Not when he is closely associated with the people?

LADY RIDGELEY.

Well, on the whole he has improved perhaps. I used to consider his manners highly objectionable.

DEREK.

Mamma didn't.

LADY RIDGELEY.

Eh?

DEREK.

Mamma liked Maurry.

LADY RIDGELEY.

Your poor mother?

DEREK.

Yes, poor mamma liked Maurry very, very much indeed.

GERALDINE.

You are drawing upon your imagination, Derek. How can you possibly remember?

DEREK.

I *do* remember.

LADY RIDGELEY.

It's not improbable, Geraldine. My girl was tolerant of every living soul. [*Producing a black-bordered handkerchief.*] She was charity and forbearance personified.

DEREK.

[*Thoughtfully, his elbow on the arm of the chair, his cheek resting upon his hand.*] I was rather young, of course, when mamma was alive, but I do remember.

GERALDINE.

What?

DEREK.

I can't exactly say *what* I remember, Aunt Geraldine. Only I know—I *know*——

LADY RIDGELEY.

[*Furtively wiping her eyes.*] You know——?

DEREK.

[*Gazing into space, his brows knit.*] Somehow I *know* that Maury was mamma's chum, just as he is mine.

LADY RIDGELEY.

Chum?

GERALDINE.

Friend, mother.

LADY RIDGELEY.

Where *does* the child pick up these curious expressions?

DEREK.

From Nina. When Nina was my governess——

NINA.

[*Rising and advancing.*] Oh!

GERALDINE.

[*Silencing DEREK.*] Derek!

NINA.

[*Standing over DEREK.*] You ungenerous little sneak!

GERALDINE.

[*Rising.*] Nina!

NINA.

[*To DEREK.*] When I was your governess—for my sins!—didn't I teach you croquet and cricket? Didn't I bowl to you everlastingly in the hot sun?

LADY RIDGELEY.

Mrs. Jesson —

NINA.

Mind, not another lob do I send you down this summer! I swear it!

LADY RIDGELEY.

Lob!

Mlle. Thomé.

[*Seated at the round table.*] *Prenez garde! les messieurs!*

GERALDINE.

[*Walking away to the right.*] Hush, mother!

[*As GERALDINE settles herself upon the settee in front of the writing-table, the further door opens, and MAUREWARDE appears. He is a big, handsome, stern-faced man of forty-three.*

DEREK.

[*Slipping from his chair.*] Maurty!

NINA.

[*To MAUREWARDE, wilfully—pointing to DEREK.*] Major Maurewarde, your *pal* is waiting for you impatiently.

LADY RIDGELEY.

[*Faintly.*] Oh, dear!

DEREK.

[*Holding up an admonitory finger to MAUREWARDE, who comes to him.*] Is this what you call "only a cigarette," Maury?

MAUREWARDE.

[*Gruffy.*] There's been a political discussion at the table. I was obliged to smoke a cigar.

DEREK.

[*Sarcastically.*] Obligated!

MAUREWARDE.

[*Sitting in the chair near LADY RIDGELEY, with DEREK between his knees.*] It was a small one—a tiny Cabaña.

DEREK.

Small or large, I shall think twice before I take the word of a soldier again.

LADY RIDGELEY.

Child!

GERALDINE.

Derek!

Mlle. THOMÉ.

[*Softly closing the piano and putting the music away.*]
Quel enfant!

NINA.

[*Under her breath, sitting at the writing-table.*] Little devil!

MAUREWARDE.

[*To DEREK.*] Anyhow, I couldn't interrupt the talk. I wanted to come to you sooner.

DEREK.

[*Relenting.*] There, don't be frightened ; I'm only pretending to be angry with you. [*Laying his head against MAUREWARDE'S shoulder.*] Oh, it has seemed hours and hours !

MAUREWARDE.

[*Pressing the boy to him.*] Has it ?

[*HILARY enters with SIR DANIEL RIDGELEY—a tall, imposing old gentleman with a long, white beard. They are followed by FILMER and—after a short interval—by PRYCE RIDGELEY and HARDING. PRYCE is a pompous, supercilious person of thirty-four. All the men, except HILARY are wearing black neck-ties.*

SIR DANIEL.

[*As he enters, to FILMER.*] You astonish me. I can hardly credit it, Filmer. What a vulgar world we live in ! A deplorably vulgar world !

HILARY.

[*Going to LADY RIDGELEY.*] Dear Lady Ridgeley, I haven't had a word with you all the evening.

LADY RIDGELEY.

You have been too busily engaged in entertaining Mrs. Jesson and Miss Tomy.

HILARY.

Er—ahem—— ! [*Facing the others quickly, his back to the fire.*] A vulgar world, you say, Sir Daniel ? Is it really ?

SIR DANIEL.

[*Advancing.*] I wish I could find grounds for believing otherwise.

HILARY.

There are a few vulgar people kicking about in it, certainly. What are the few doing to annoy you, sir?

SIR DANIEL.

You didn't hear what your brother has been telling me. [To LADY RIDGELEY.] Harriet, they are treating the opening of the park to-morrow as a festivity.

LADY RIDGELEY.

A festivity!

PRYCE.

[Leaving HARDING, with whom he has been talking.] Festivity! Rubbish, father!

SIR DANIEL.

A considerable part of the route is lavishly decorated, it appears.

LADY RIDGELEY.

No, Dan!

SIR DANIEL.

With flags and garlands.

PRYCE.

Flags and garlands!

SIR DANIEL.

Filmer is my informant.

LADY RIDGELEY.

Geraldine, those *were* banners I caught sight of as we drove from the station!

GERALDINE.

I meant to break it to you by and by, mother.

FILMER.

I assure you it has been quite out of my power to prevent this display.

LADY RIDGELEY.

Shocking !

PRYCE.

Outrageous ! Who has done it ? Flags don't hang themselves.

FILMER.

[*To HARDING, who has joined M^{RS}. THOME.*] Harding, who pays for the decoration of the streets ?

HARDING.

The townspeople, sir, by subscription. The mayor headed the list with five pounds.

PRYCE.

[*Taking up a newspaper from the round table.*] A gross breach of taste on his part.

FILMER.

The platform at the park gates—there I *have* been able to exercise control. I fancy you will be pleased with the draping of the platform.

GERALDINE.

I chose the shade of purple myself, mother.

FILMER.

And as for the rest, we must recollect there are two sides to the picture.

SIR DANIEL.

I confess I fail——

HILARY.

Oh, come, Sir Daniel! Isn't old Filmer giving 'em what will some day be an oasis in a desert of bricks and mortar? Isn't he giving 'em a green carpet for tired feet; comfortable seats for weary bodies; secluded walks for young lovers ——?

LADY RIDGELEY.

That I hope he is not.

HILARY.

[*To LADY RIDGELEY.*] Forgive me. [*To FILMER.*] Do I understand there are no lovers in your constituency, Filmer?

SIR DANIEL.

Must we always be jesting?

PRYCE.

[*To LADY RIDGELEY.*] We shall feel precisely like a circus to-morrow, mother.

SIR DANIEL.

We may look like a circus; I trust we shall not feel like one.

PRYCE.

[*Sitting in a chair by the piano.*] You ought to have found a means of squelching it, Filmer; upon my word, you ought.

FILMER.

[*Going to him.*] My dear Pryce ——

SIR DANIEL.

Tscht, tscht, tscht! We can easily lower our eyes as we go through the town. [*Seating himself beside GERALDINE.*] Geraldine, I want to thank you for the excellent

meal you set before us this evening. We poor mortals must be nourished, I suppose, in all circumstances. You remembered everything for which I have an appetite.

GERALDINE.

Naturally, father.

SIR DANIEL.

You are an admirable hostess, my dear. [NINA *pricks up her ears and leans forward, listening.*] I won't flatter you by comparing you with poor Bel. But you are an admirable hostess.

NINA.

[*In a hard voice.*] Yes, isn't she?

GERALDINE.

[*Startled.*] Oh!

SIR DANIEL.

[*Turning.*] Eh—I beg your pardon —?

NINA.

An admirable hostess.

SIR DANIEL.

I was just remarking —

NINA.

[*Rising.*] Yes, I heard you. I agreed—an admirable hostess.

[*She moves to the middle of the room and looks about her. HILARY is employed in conciliating LADY RIDGELEY. MAUREWARDE is talking to DEREK, FILMER to PRYCE, HARDING to Mlle. THOMÉ. She pauses irresolutely, then sits in the chair in front of the round table and leans her head upon her hands.*]

SIR DANIEL.

[To GERALDINE, *mystified*.] I—I don't ——

GERALDINE.

Hush! Nina is a very jealous young woman, father, I regret to say. Please take no notice.

SIR DANIEL.

Jealous?

GERALDINE.

Horribly jealous.

SIR DANIEL.

How terrible!

GERALDINE.

As jealous as she is helpless, poor thing.

SIR DANIEL.

What a dreadful affliction, Geraldine!

GERALDINE.

Jealousy?

SIR DANIEL.

Jealousy.

GERALDINE.

Dreadful—dreadful.

FILMER.

[*Leaving PRYCE and discovering DEREK.*] What, Derek! Are you still up? Be off to bed.

DEREK.

Give me a little longer, father.

HIS HOUSE IN ORDER

FILMER.

Not a moment. [*To Mlle. Thomé.*] Mademoiselle —

Mlle. Thomé.

[*Hurrying forward.*] Mais oui, c'est trop tard; c'est mauvais pour lui.

[*She goes to the nearer door and remains there, waiting for DEREK. A servant enters at the further door and speaks to HARDING.*

DEREK.

[*Shaking MAUREWARDE'S arm.*] Beg for me again, Maurry. Have another try.

MAUREWARDE.

[*To FILMER, brusquely.*] Where's the harm in the boy breaking rules for once in a way? You coddle him as if he was a girl.

FILMER.

[*Looking at his watch.*] My dear Guy —

LADY RIDGELEY.

Major Maurewarde! [*To FILMER.*] Filmer —

MAUREWARDE.

[*Kissing the boy.*] Good-night. Do as you're bid.

DEREK.

[*Throwing his arms round MAUREWARDE'S neck.*] Good-night, Maurry. Good-night, dear, dear old Maurry.

[*MAUREWARDE, putting the boy from him, rises and walks away to the round table. He addresses a word or two to NINA, but meeting with little response he picks up a newspaper and shakes it open.*

DEREK.

[*To LADY RIDGELEY.*] Good-night, grandma.

LADY RIDGELEY.

[*Kissing him gloomily.*] Good-night. You needn't wash, but don't hurry over your prayers.

DEREK.

[*To HILARY.*] Good-night, Uncle Hilary. [*Shaking hands with him.*] You *were* amusing once or twice at dinner.

HILARY.

Oh, it's nothing to what I can be, old fellow.

DEREK.

Isn't it? Our servants *will* miss you when you've gone. [*To FILMER.*] Good-night, father.

FILMER.

[*Kissing him.*] God bless you.

DEREK.

[*Loudly.*] Good-night, Uncle Pryce.

PRYCE.

[*Deep in his newspaper.*] Good-night, youngster.

DEREK.

[*To HARDING and the servant.*] Good-night, Mr. Harding. Good-night, Blyth.

HARDING.

Good-night, Derek.

SERVANT.

Good-night, sir.

[*NINA turns her chair quickly and looks at the boy.*
SIR DANIEL and GERALDINE rise and come to
DEREK.

HIS HOUSE IN ORDER

DEREK.

[*Shaking hands with SIR DANIEL.*] Good-night,
grandpa. [*Receiving GERALDINE'S kiss.*] Good-night,
aunt.

[*SIR DANIEL and GERALDINE move over to the fire-
place, where FILMER has joined HILARY.*

DEREK.

[*To Mlle. Thomé.*] I'm ready, Mam'selle.

Mlle. Thomé.

[*Motioning him to precede her.*] Venez vite!

DEREK.

[*Politely.*] Non, non; après vous. *Honneur aux
dames.*

Mlle. Thomé.

Merci, mon petit chéri.

[*Mlle. Thomé goes out. DEREK is following her,
when NINA, unobserved, rises and calls to him.*

NINA.

Derek —

DEREK.

Yes?

NINA.

[*Advancing.*] Good-night, Derek.

DEREK.

[*Carelessly.*] Oh, good-night, Nina.

[*He departs, NINA, with a blank face, sits upon the
settee in front of the writing-table. GERALDINE
is now seated beside her mother, SIR DANIEL in
the chair on the extreme left. The servant with-
draws and HARDING approaches FILMER.*

HARDING.

[To FILMER.] Very sorry to disturb you, sir. Here's the mayor.

FILMER.

The mayor? [*Irritably.*] What on earth is wrong now, Harding?

HARDING.

Nothing, I hope. He sends a message by Blyth about some petition he wishes to present to you.

FILMER.

[*Sitting in the chair near* LADY RIDGELEY.] Oh, attend to him. [*HARDING is going.*] Harding —

HARDING.

[*Pausing.*] Sir?

FILMER.

We had better show Dilnott every civility. Bring him in.

[*HARDING nods and disappears. HILARY leaves the group at the fireplace and slowly crosses over to NINA.*]

FILMER.

[To LADY RIDGELEY.] You remember Dilnott?

LADY RIDGELEY.

The doctor?

GERALDINE.

He is mayor this year, mother.

PRYCE.

[*From behind his paper.*] A loud, oppressive person.

SIR DANIEL.

The man who has contributed to the defacement of the town!

[The conversation is continued in dumb-show.]

HILARY.

[Looking down upon NINA, softly.] Well, little lady?

NINA.

[Barely raising her eyes.] Well?

HILARY.

[Drawing a chair toward her and sitting.] How goes it?

NINA.

Wretchedly.

HILARY.

[In low tones and with an eye on the others.] Why, I thought we got through dinner in tip-top style.

NINA.

Thanks to you. But since! They're worse than ever this evening.

HILARY.

The old folks?

NINA.

Old and young. That imp Derek was leaving the room without bidding me good-night.

HILARY.

A child.

NINA.

A child can hurt. He's clever enough to take his cue from the rest. *[Edging nearer to him.]* Hilary —

HILARY.

Yes?

NINA.

[With a jerk of the head toward the other side of the writing-table.] I was sitting there a minute ago and heard Sir Daniel complimenting Geraldine.

HILARY.

Complimenting her?

NINA.

Upon being an admirable hostess!

HILARY.

He didn't notice you were near?

NINA.

Perhaps not.

HILARY.

Then *he* had no intention to wound. *[With a change of manner.]* Nina, I wonder whether you would do something for me.

NINA.

For you?

HILARY.

For yourself. *[Shifting his chair closer to her.]* Don't you think it would be worth while to try to conciliate these people —?

NINA.

Conciliate them!

HILARY.

Yes.

NINA.

[*Flaring up.*] The Ridgeleys!

HILARY.

Hush!—to break down their prejudice against you, to soften them, to win them over?

NINA.

How can you propose such a thing?

HILARY.

I do propose it. And you could manage it, if you'd make the effort. Bear in mind, their conduct, regarded humanly, is not altogether without excuse.

NINA.

Excuse!

HILARY.

Oh, they're a stupid, illiberal, bigoted crew; but they loved the poor lady who has passed away—adored her—with all their shallow souls. They hallow the ground her feet have trod, the objects her eyes have rested upon. Realize that—get that into your head—and pity them, *pity* them. I speak bluntly, brutally—the very sight of another in Annabel's place, or near it, is agony to them, makes 'em writhe.

NINA.

I'm glad of it! That's my crumb of satisfaction. I'm glad of it!

HILARY.

[*As if about to rise.*] In that case, my dear——

NINA.

[*Detaining him.*] Ah, no, don't be hasty with me; don't you turn against me.

HILARY.

[*Gently releasing his sleeve from her grip.*] I? Oh, I'll not chuck you, never fear. But listen, Nina; now, listen. Be reasonable; be compassionate; be politic. [*Significantly.*] My dear child, if you could force yourself to feel tenderly toward Annabel's belongings; if you could bring yourself to offer them some proof of sympathy, if not of affection; you would be doing a great deal more than propitiating the Ridgeleys.

NINA.

More?

HILARY.

I believe it would be a step to a better understanding with Filmer.

NINA.

With Filmer?

HILARY.

With your husband.

NINA.

My husband is one of them. [*Excitedly.*] They possess him, through his dependence on Geraldine!

HILARY.

Hush, hush!

NINA.

After freeing himself from them, by marrying me, he has returned to the fold. He is simply another Ridgeley.

HILARY.

An argument in my favor. [*Persistently.*] What do you say? [*A pause.*] Nina——

NINA.

[*Wavering.*] How—how should I begin?

HILARY.

Surely you don't need me to instruct you there?

NINA.

[*Slowly, after a sidelong glance at him.*] You mean that I must proceed to enrol myself among the Annabel worshippers. [*Another pause.*] Eh?

HILARY.

[*With a shrug.*] H'm, well——

NINA.

The Society of Annabel Worshippers! That is what you mean, isn't it? [*He nods.*] Yes, I suppose I must come to it; I suppose I must bend the knee. [*Drawing a deep breath.*] Annabel—Annabel—Annabel——!

[*HARDING reappears, bringing in DR. DILNOTT.*

DILNOTT is a jovial, bustling man in a frock-coat. There is a general movement.

HARDING.

The mayor.

FILMER.

[*Rising to greet him.*] Good-evening, doctor.

DILNOTT.

[*Shaking hands vigorously all round.*] How d'ye do? How d'ye do? Excuse my dress; haven't had time to rig myself out. [*To SIR DANIEL.*] Ah, Sir Daniel! You're looking fit. How's Lady Ridgeley? [*Discovering LADY RIDGELEY.*] Here she is. And Miss Geraldine. [*To PRYCE.*] Hallo, is that you, Mr. Ridgeley? [*To MAUREWARDE.*] How are you, Major? Caught sight of you in the street this afternoon.

FILMER.

[*To DILNOTT.*] You know my brother?

DILNOTT.

[*Shaking hands with HILARY.*] Happy to meet you again. [*Running his hand over his head.*] A few more gray hairs, hey? Ha, ha!

HILARY.

[*Laughing.*] Yes, we've both been out in the snow, Dilnott.

DILNOTT.

[*Seeing NINA, who has risen, and bowing to her deferentially but with some constraint.*] Good-evening, Mrs. Jesson.

[*She bows in response and shortly afterward moves away.*]

FILMER.

[*To DILNOTT.*] You have had a fatiguing day?

DILNOTT.

Fatiguing! Ouf! However, the result amply repays me.

FILMER.

Result?

SIR DANIEL.

[*Advancing.*] Well said, doctor. You follow one of the noblest of callings—medicine.

DILNOTT.

Oh, I'm not thinking of doctoring for the moment. Ha, ha, ha!

SIR DANIEL.

Not?

DILNOTT.

Pills and plasters are all very well in their way. I'm speaking of our decorations.

SIR DANIEL.

Your ——?

DILNOTT.

The decoration of the streets.

HILARY.

[*Tugging lightly at DILNOTT's coat.*] Ahem ——!

DILNOTT.

[*To HILARY.*] Eh?

HILARY.

[*Seating himself on the extreme right.*] Pardon.

DILNOTT.

I and the Decoration Committee have been hard at it since eight o'clock this morning. [*Looking about him in search of approval.*] We are not giving you such a bad show, are we?

SIR DANIEL.

[*Restraining himself with an effort.*] No, you are not.

LADY RIDGELEY.

[*To GERALDINE.*] Show!

[*FILMER goes to PRYCE, who is fuming, and endeavors to pacify him.*]

DILNOTT.

And we haven't done yet, I can tell you, by any means. [*Sitting on the settee in front of the writing-table.*] We've had a tremendous windfall?

SIR DANIEL.

Windfall?

DILNOTT.

Just as our decoration fund had touched bottom, old

Sam Adamson—the proprietor of the Swan Hotel, you know—old Sam came along with a second donation.

SIR DANIEL.

Oh—ah—*did* he?

DILNOTT.

You see, Sam is a bit of a sporting character. He backed Mr. Bowen's Silver-Fiddle at Trantham races last week and won fifty pound. He's handed half of it over to us, to put up a triumphal arch at the top of Castle Street.

[HILARY rises sharply and walks away to the further end of the room where he is joined by MAUREWARDE who has been talking to NINA. SIR DANIEL and FILMER sit suddenly, aghast, the former in the chair near LADY RIDGELEY, the latter in the chair in front of the round table. NINA is now upon the settee beside the writing-table.]

GERALDINE.

A triumphal arch?

LADY RIDGELEY.

[Shutting her eyes.] A triumphal arch!

PRYCE.

[Advancing.] A triumphal arch. [With polite sarcasm.] Oh, yes, extremely nice and appropriate. We required that for a dainty finishing touch.

DILNOTT.

[Unconsciously.] So Sam thought.

PRYCE.

Finis coronat opus.

DILNOTT.

[Wiping his brow.] The town-council didn't pass the

plan till a couple of hours ago. The lads will have to stick to it all night.

PRYCE.

Losing their well-earned repose. [*Moving to the fireplace.*] Delightful instance of self-sacrifice, Geraldine.

GERALDINE.

[*Rising and laying a hand upon his arm soothingly.*] Pryce —

HARDING.

[*Who had been standing at the round table, to FILMER, interposing.*] The mayor has called to talk to you upon an entirely different matter from this, sir. [*To DILNOTT.*] Mr. Mayor —

DILNOTT.

Quite right, quite right, Mr. Harding—the band-stand.

FILMER.

[*Vaguely.*] Band-stand?

DILNOTT.

[*Struggling to extract a bulky object from his tail-pocket—to FILMER.*] You're aware that some of the townspeople want you to erect a permanent band-stand in the new park? [*The RIDGELEYS stare at each other incredulously. DILNOTT at length succeeds in producing a weighty-looking document of many sheets.*] On the south walk, near the lake.

SIR DANIEL.

Permanent —

LADY RIDGELEY.

Band-stand —

GERALDINE.

In the new —

PRYCE.

In the new park?

DILNOTT.

The town-band has never been provided with a proper, dignified pitch since it was organized. [*Turning the leaves of the document.*] There are three hundred and eighty-five—eighty-six—signatures to the request I'm asked to present to you. [*FILMER rises and accepts the paper from DILNOTT.*] Good, sound names; you'll recognize the majority of them.

SIR DANIEL.

And it is seriously proposed to associate the memory of my late daughter with the regular performance of music in public?

DILNOTT.

[*Deprecatingly.*] On a fine summer evening —

LADY RIDGELEY.

Polkas!

GERALDINE.

Waltzes!

PRYCE.

And cake-dances, I presume!

FILMER.

[*Examining the petition.*] We have received several communications about this business, haven't we, Harding?

HARDING.

We have, sir.

FILMER.

The town is not altogether unanimous on the subject.

HARDING.

There *is* an opposition.

SIR DANIEL.

Ah!

DILNOTT.

Yes, the sanctimonious set have had their knives in the municipal band from the beginning.

SIR DANIEL.

[*Gravely.*] My dear sir —

FILMER.

[*To HARDING.*] And we've replied to both parties —?

HARDING.

That their representations shall receive every consideration.

SIR DANIEL.

To *both* parties!

FILMER.

[*Sitting in a chair by DILNOTT.*] We ought to remember—it is fair to remember—that there are various kinds of music; to some of which, I take it, no objection can be raised. There is sacred music, for example.

SIR DANIEL.

[*Emphatically.*] The whole idea of open-air music, although gaining ground rapidly in this country—music of *any* kind in the open air—is contrary to what I conceive to be the English spirit.

LADY RIDGELEY.

It brings the sexes closely together.

SIR DANIEL.

[To LADY RIDGELEY.] That is so.

LADY RIDGELEY.

In a word, it is essentially continental.

DILNOTT.

As mayor, I refrain from offering an opinion, *pro* or *con*. [*Forcibly.*] If my mouth *wasn't* shut — [To HILARY, who, having left MAUREWARDE, appears in the centre of the room.] Ah, Mr. Jesson —

HILARY.

Eh?

DILNOTT.

Come now! Band-stand or no band-stand? Which side do you vote on?

HILARY.

Oh, I vote for your doing fearlessly what you imagine would have been most acceptable to the lady to whom the park is dedicated.

LADY RIDGELEY.

Exactly.

SIR DANIEL.

I thank you.

PRYCE.

[*Standing with his back to the fire, his coat-tails over his arms.*] There can be no question as to what my sister's response would have been to such a demand.

GERALDINE.

[*Advancing.*] If I may speak, I am sure our dear Bel would have preferred that the people, while in her park, should content themselves with the study of nature.

HILARY.

Nature ?

GERALDINE.

The flowers.

LADY RIDGELEY.

Grass.

PRYCE.

Birds.

GERALDINE.

[*Sitting at the round table.*] The trees.

HILARY.

[*Seating himself in the chair in front of the round table.*] The trees are nearly five feet high, aren't they ?

DILNOTT.

[*Chuckling.*] Ha, ha, ha !

HILARY.

[*To MAUREWARDE, who is standing at the writing-table.*] My dear Guy, what are your views ?

MAUREWARDE.

[*As if startled by the question.*] Mine ?

HILARY.

Yours, old friend. Would poor Annabel have liked the people to enjoy a little music in her park ?

MAUREWARDE.

[*After a pause.*] Yes.

PRYCE.

Indeed?

GERALDINE.

Major Maurewarde is very positive.

MAUREWARDE.

[*Roughly.*] She might not have said as much, but she'd have wished it all the same.

FILMER.

[*Pained.*] My good fellow!

LADY RIDGELEY.

Wished it, and not have said so!

SIR DANIEL.

Hush! Wait, Harriet. [*To MAUREWARDE.*] Do you imply, Major Maurewarde, that my child was capable in the smallest degree of an act of—of——?

LADY RIDGELEY.

Deceit?

SIR DANIEL.

Insincerity?

MAUREWARDE.

[*Advancing a few steps, a note of passion in his voice.*] I imply nothing, Sir Daniel, except that Bel was at heart the tenderest, the most sympathetic little woman in the world. [*Checking himself.*] I—I beg your pardon. Hilary appealed to me as an old friend——

PRYCE.

[*Loftily.*] It seems to me——

FILMER.

[*Holding up a hand.*] Please, please! [*Frowning.*] We can scarcely expect Dr. Dinnott [*looking round*] and—and Mr. Harding to be interested in this discussion.

SIR DANIEL.

No, no, certainly not.

PRYCE.

[*With a sniff.*] Some other time.

FILMER.

[*Rising, stiffly.*] Meanwhile, my position in this affair of the band-stand is a trifle perplexing. [*Laying the petition on the writing-table.*] It is obvious that I must offend half the leading townspeople by erecting the paltry thing or the other half by declining to do so.

PRYCE.

[*Advancing to FILMER.*] Why not compromise? I am always for compromising in a difficulty of this sort.

FILMER.

Compromise?

PRYCE.

What about a—a—a drinking-fountain?

FILMER.

Drinking-fountain!

SIR DANIEL.

Ah, excellent.

GERALDINE.

There you would be supplying an urgent need.

PRYCE.

[*Going to GERALDINE.*] You know, Geraldine; one of those large, circular basins with metal cups.

HILARY.

[*Quietly.*] At any rate, that would be English.

LADY RIDGELEY.

[*To FILMER, who now moves, a little irritably, over to the fireplace.*] The cups must be secured by chains, Filmer.

SIR DANIEL.

Yes, ingratitude and dishonesty flourish in every community.

HILARY.

[*Rising.*] Stop! Another idea occurs to me.

SIR DANIEL.

My son's strikes me as hard to improve upon.

HILARY.

Oh, I'm for compromise also. But a drinking-fountain, Sir Daniel—unless for the refreshment of the cornet and the bassoon! No, I fancy I've a better plan than Ridgeley's for dealing with the embarrassing situation.

FILMER.

What's your plan, Hilary?

HILARY.

[*Deliberately.*] Why shouldn't Mrs. Nina give them the band-stand?

FILMER.

[*Surprised.*] Nina?

HILARY.

Nina. [*The RIDGELEYS stare at NINA, who rises with wide-open eyes.*] After all, isn't it almost presumptuous for us solemnly to attempt to decide whether or not poor

dear Annabel would have grudged the town a little harmless gaiety inside her park or out of it? The real problem Filmer has to solve is how to please one section of the townspeople and to mollify the other. Let Nina, if she will, add her tribute to Filmer's. It would be a particularly graceful act, proceeding from her, and would be bound to disarm the adverse division.

DILNOTT.

[*Slapping his knee.*] By Jim, you've hit it!

HILARY.

Is there anything in my notion?

MAUREWARDE.

[*Seated on the extreme right.*] Yes.

HILARY.

[*To FILMER.*] Eh, Filmer?

FILMER.

[*Eyeing the RIDGELEYS.*] Yes, there's something in it undoubtedly.

[*HILARY makes way for NINA, who advances. He touches her arm encouragingly as she comes forward and they exchange glances. The RIDGELEYS are now gazing at the walls, the ceiling, in every direction but in NINA'S.*

NINA.

[*To FILMER.*] Filmer—

FILMER.

My dear?

NINA.

I—I hope I may be allowed to do this.

FILMER.

[*Looking at the RIDGELEYS again.*] Of course, it all depends upon—er——

NINA.

[*In a clear voice.*] Lady Ridgeley—Sir Daniel—Geraldine—Pryce—I beg to be allowed to do this. [*Drawing herself up.*] I want to do it—as a mark of respect for Annabel.

SIR DANIEL.

[*Rising after a brief silence and addressing LADY RIDGELEY.*] Perhaps, Harriet, you can express more adequately than I our—ahem!—our sense of obligation to Mrs. Jesson. [*LADY RIDGELEY rises for the first time, formidably.*] I content myself with saying we are most appreciative. [*Joining PRYCE and GERALDINE, the latter rising to receive him.*] Most appreciative.

GERALDINE.

Most. [*Her head in the air.*]

PRYCE.

Oh, most. [*His head in the air.*]

LADY RIDGELEY.

Sir Daniel unwittingly imposes an uncongenial task upon me. Thankfulness we cannot *help* feeling for any acknowledgment of my late daughter's goodness, from whatever source it proceeds and however tardily it may be made. But I, for one, am unable to regard as "a mark of respect" for the departed an act which deliberately violates the sentiments and convictions of her family.

[*She goes to GERALDINE and they seat themselves in the chairs by the piano. SIR DANIEL and PRYCE talk together.*]

FILMER.

[*To NINA, without meeting her eye.*] That being so, my

dear Nina, I fear your project—your generous project—yours and Hilary's—er—*[turning to mend the fire]* falls through.

[Once more NINA and HILARY glance at each other. He shrugs his shoulders angrily. DILNOTT and MAUREWARDE rise.]

DILNOTT.

[Taking NINA's hand sympathetically.] Good-night; good-night.

NINA.

[Faintly.] Good-night.

DILNOTT.

[Patting her hand.] Come and have tea with my wife and girls some day. Do, now.

NINA.

[Dashing a tear away.] I—I will.

DILNOTT.

[Passing her and shaking hands coolly with FILMER.] Sorry to have intruded.

FILMER.

Glad to have seen you.

DILNOTT.

[Pointing to the petition.] That petition will come in handy for lighting your fire. *[Sourly.]* Ha, ha! *[Shaking hands with HILARY.]* Till the morning. *[Bowing formally to the RIDGELEYS who bow stiffly in return.]* Good-night.

FILMER.

[To HARDING, who has been sitting on the right of the round table.] Mr. Harding —

[DILNOTT shakes hands with MAUREWARDE and departs, accompanied by HARDING, at the further door. HILARY goes to FILMER.]

HILARY.

[Under his breath, to FILMER, in a tone of expostulation.] Filmer!

FILMER.

What — ?

HILARY.

[Pointing to NINA who is seated disconsolately upon the settle in front of the writing-table.] Ah!

[He throws himself into the chair by the settle on the left. FILMER advances to NINA.]

PRYCE.

[Referring to DILNOTT.] A doctor! He hasn't the manners of a chemist.

FILMER.

[Sitting beside NINA, uncomfortably.] Er—I am afraid you are rather disappointed, Nina. But the more one thinks of it—an ugly, flaunting band-stand!—impossible, my dear.

NINA.

[Submissively.] Yes, Filmer.

FILMER.

Still, that doesn't detract from your kind intentions, which have touched me as deeply as they—er—as they have touched others.

NINA.

[Almost inaudibly, with a movement toward him.] Ah — !

FILMER.

And the drinking-fountain remains—Pryce's capital suggestion ; doesn't it ? There's the fountain.

NINA.

[*Eagerly.*] The fountain ?

FILMER.

Not as a substitute for a band-stand—absurd !—but as a thing that is needful ; a thing, as Geraldine reminds us, of absolute utility.

NINA.

Which might be made a beautiful thing !

FILMER.

[*Nodding his head.*] Well ——

NINA.

[*With growing enthusiasm.*] Instead of a dank-looking trough, a pretty, delicate work of art !

FILMER.

[*Assentingly.*] H'm, yes.

NINA.

Emblematic of purity and sweetness ! [*He nods again.*] Filmer ! [*Breathlessly.*] I may make *that* my offering to—to Annabel ?

FILMER.

[*Glancing at the RIDGELEYS.*] I don't anticipate ——

NINA.

A big man ought to execute it—a London sculptor. Who would be the best —— ?

[*The RIDGELEYS have been looking on and listening with marked disapproval. SIR DANIEL now comes forward.*]

SIR DANIEL.

Excuse me, dear Filmer, but are you quite—ahem!—quite certain ——?

FILMER.

Certain ——?

SIR DANIEL.

That it is necessary to add *anything* to your already stupendous gift to the town?

PRYCE.

[*Advancing.*] Just to humor a parcel of exacting beggars!

LADY RIDGELEY.

[*Rising.*] They will be clamoring for boats on the lake next.

GERALDINE.

[*Rising with* LADY RIDGELEY.] Or swans.

FILMER.

[*Rising.*] Good gracious me, a moment ago you were all *for* a fountain!

PRYCE.

My dear chap, surely one may—er—reconsider ——

SIR DANIEL.

Modify ——

LADY RIDGELEY.

In any event, Filmer, such a “work of art” as Mrs. Jesson desires ——

GERALDINE.

A *delicate* work of art!

LADY RIDGELEY.

Such a work of art must not be persisted in.

GERALDINE.

It would have shocked my sister terribly.

LADY RIDGELEY.

Horrified her.

FILMER.

Shocked Annabel?

SIR DANIEL.

A fanciful piece of sculpture, designed as a medium for the conveyance of water, invariably includes the delineation of a human figure.

PRYCE.

You may call it a nymph, or a naiad, but it's nothing less than a ——

GERALDINE.

That will do, Pryce.

SIR DANIEL.

If men and women have a relish for that form of "art" ——

LADY RIDGELEY.

There is the continent.

SIR DANIEL.

But in my daughter's park ——

GERALDINE.

Poor Bel's park!

FILMER.

[*Somewhat irritably.*] Very well, then, we'll drop it. We'll drop it.

[*The RIDGELEYS appear greatly relieved. HILARY rises and, going to the fireplace, stands gazing into the fire. NINA starts up, clasping her brow.*

FILMER.

I suppose no addition to my gift is called for. If old Dilmott hadn't busied himself —

NINA.

[*Uttering a loud, involuntary cry.*] Oh!

FILMER.

[*Turning to her.*] My dear?

NINA.

[*Calling to HILARY.*] Hilary! Hilary!

GERALDINE.

[*Coming forward.*] Nina, pray remember where you are.

NINA.

Hilary—you see—you see — ! [*Fiercely, through her tears.*] Oh—h — !

[*She goes quickly out of the room, at the nearer door.*

FILMER.

[*Following her to the door, irresolutely.*] Geraldine —

GERALDINE.

[*Calmly.*] We had better leave her to recover herself, Filmer.

[*She sits, on the extreme right. FILMER, disturbed, paces the room.*

LADY RIDGELEY.

[*Sitting herself upon the settle in front of the writing-table.*] Oh, dear!

PRYCE.

[*Sitting near her, muttering.*] Extraordinary exhibition!

SIR DANIEL.

[*Sitting in the chair in front of the round table—to FILMER.*] Is your wife subject to these—ah—these fits of hysteria?

LADY RIDGELEY.

[*In a faint voice, but loud enough to be heard by everybody.*] How different! [*Raising her hands.*] Annabel!

GERALDINE.

[*Sighing heavily.*] Ah!

PRYCE.

Ah!

SIR DANIEL.

[*Glancing at FILMER, considerably.*] Hush, hush! My dears!

HILARY.

[*Facing them suddenly and speaking in a tone which compels attention.*] Sir Daniel—Filmer— [*The RIDGELEYS look at him with raised eyebrows.*] May I tell you all a little story? Will it bore you? The tragical history—shall we call it?—of Henri and Adolphe! [*MAUREWARDE, who is upon the settle beside the writing-table, raises his head. FILMER is now standing on the right of the round table; as the story progresses, he sits.*] When I was in Paris, in my early days in the diplomatic service, I used to dine frequently at the house of a friend in the

Rue de Chaillot, whose kitchen was presided over by a *chef* of very remarkable talent. Talent! The fellow was a marvel! His *Oreilles d'Agneau farcies* were pronounced by elderly gourmets to be the equal of the great Lhermite's; and I can never recall his *Canard en Chemise* without a sensation of mingled ecstasy and regret. His name—he is still alive and kicking—cooking—his name is Henri Maximilien Carolus Levasseur, and he is now the proprietor of the famous Restaurant Levasseur on the Boulevard de Sébastopol. You should treat my lady to Paris oftener, Sir Daniel.

LADY RIDGELEY.

I am not fond of Paris.

SIR DANIEL.

We are not fond of Paris.

PRYCE.

Nor of French messes.

HILARY.

The maison Levasseur would reconcile you to both. Well, having spent some years in the Rue de Chaillot, the wonderful Henri determined to *risquer le tout pour le tout*—to launch out on his own account—and my friend, his master, was broken-hearted. However, a successor to Henri *had* to be found, and in due course a certain Adolphe was installed in his place.

PRYCE.

What's the point of the yarn, Jesson?

HILARY.

I am approaching it, dear Ridgeley. The point is that Adolphe was an earnest, not unintelligent creature who might—who would—have ended by filling his predecessor's shoes with moderate success but for the lack of—how shall I put it?—a little encouragement.

SIR DANIEL.

[*Suspiciously.*] Encouragement?

HILARY.

[*To SIR DANIEL.*] Encouragement, sir. Don't we all need encouragement, in every department of life? *We're* pretty prosperous—we who are in this room; do we owe nothing to it? Didn't I come in for my share, from my chief, in those old days, and wasn't my sleep the sounder for it? Doesn't Filmer get his pat-on-the-back, to-day, from his leader? Is it of no help to him? Did you never hunger for a word of praise, Sir Daniel—aye, and receive it—during your period of stress and struggle; and, in memory of that time, have you never thrown a bone [*pointing to PRYCE*] into the kennel of that promising young dog there? *Cáspita!*—I always swear in a foreign tongue, Miss Geraldine—*Cáspiti!* encouragement is the only grease for our wheels on this world's roads. Pity for the poor wretch from whom it is withheld, whether she fully deserves it or not!

GERALDINE.

[*Sharply.*] She?

HILARY.

Did I say she? Well, women—God bless 'em!—women need it as much—perhaps more—than men.

GERALDINE.

[*With a short, hard laugh, tapping her foot upon the floor.*] Ha! Your cook?

HILARY.

Adolphe? Oh, *he* didn't get it. That's the point of the story, you know. Every effort of his was compared unfavorably with the achievements of the departed Henri. In vain would the unfortunate Adolphe prepare his *Oreilles d'Agneau*. They were tolerable; oh, yes, said my host,

they had merit; but—they were not Henri's. The poor devil tried his hand at a *Canard en Chemise*. H'm! So—so; passable; but—you recollect Henri's! And so, day after day, week after week, the virtues of Monsieur Henri Maximilien Carolus Levasseur were hammered and dinned into the ears of the unhappy Adolphe until—ah, yes, *this* is the point of the story —

SIR DANIEL.

[*Rising and moving away to the left.*] H'm, h'm, h'm, h'm —

HILARY.

Until the luckless young man became desperate—desperate. Ha! it might have been yesterday. It was a *grande occasion*. We boys were to dine with my friend to meet the, then, newly-appointed Russian ambassador. The evening was warm and dry, and I walked from my lodgings to the Rue de Chaillot. The doors were opened by a couple of flunkies with faces as white as Ridgeley's shirt-front. [*Looking at* LADY RIDGELEY.] What d'ye think?

LADY RIDGELEY.

[*Bridling.*] Do you address me?

HILARY.

At the last moment, Adolphe had put a charge of gun-powder into the *fourneau*—the kitchen-range, you know—and had blown it to splinters. He was lying on the floor of the *cuisine* when I arrived, being tended by surgeons. Poor, misunderstood, discouraged, defeated Adolphe! That's my story.

PRYCE.

[*Rising.*] Oh, that's your story, is it? [*Advancing to* HILARY, *aggressively.*] Eh? Well?

HILARY.

Eh, well!

PRYCE.

And what does it all amount to?

HILARY.

[*Innocently.*] Amount to! There was some slight domestic confusion, my dear Ridgeley. That's all it amounted to.

[*The further door opens and NINA returns, red-eyed and penitent. MAUREWARDE and FILMER rise as she enters; PRYCE joins SIR DANIEL; HILARY goes back to the fireplace; LADY RIDGELEY and GERALDINE stiffen themselves and stare stonily before them.*

NINA.

[*To FILMER, meekly.*] I—I apologize, Filmer. It was wrong of me to bolt from the room like that. [*He gives her his hand. She takes it gratefully, and then advances.*] Please forgive me, everybody. [*With a touch of dignity and a side glance at GERALDINE.*] I intend to turn over a new leaf and to play hostess properly in the future. [*Sitting in the chair by the settle on the left.*] Oh, forgive me.

[*FILMER looks at LADY RIDGELEY expectantly.*

LADY RIDGELEY.

Ahem! The incident is past, done with. We will dismiss it.

GERALDINE.

And I think, mother, the wisest thing for us to do, [*rising*] after what has happened —

LADY RIDGELEY.

[*Rising.*] Is to go to our beds, yes—[*to NINA, who also*

rises, humbly, as LADY RIDGELEY approaches her] first asking for strength to keep our good resolutions. [*Inclining her head distantly to HILARY.*] Good-night.

HILARY.

[*Cheerfully.*] Good-night.

LADY RIDGELEY.

[*Embracing PRYCE.*] Bless you, my boy. [*Shaking hands with FILMER.*] I pray for fine weather to-morrow.

FILMER.

The glass is steady.

GERALDINE.

[*To HILARY.*] Good-night.

HILARY.

Good-night.

LADY RIDGELEY.

[*To MAUREWARDE, coldly.*] Good-night, Major Maurewarde.

MAUREWARDE.

[*Taking his stand at the further door.*] Good-night.

[GERALDINE kisses SIR DANIEL and PRYCE affectionately, and shakes hands with FILMER.]

GERALDINE.

[*To each of the three.*] Good-night. [*To NINA.*]
Nina —

[NINA shakes hands mutely with HILARY, SIR DANIEL and PRYCE, and offers her brow to FILMER to be kissed. He kisses her, and she is following GERALDINE and LADY RIDGELEY obediently, when M^{RS}. THOME enters at the nearer door.]

MLLE. THOMÉ.

Ah! *Excuses-moi.* Mees Geraldine —

GERALDINE.

[*Pausing.*] Eh?

MLLE. THOMÉ.

Will you come up-stairs and speak to Dereek?

FILMER.

[*Anxiously.*] Dereek?

MLLE. THOMÉ.

[*Going to FILMER.*] 'E vill not compose 'imself to sleep. [GERALDINE *passes* NINA *and comes to* MLLE THOMÉ.] 'E says 'e wants to arrange 'is books in 'is new schoolroom in ze morning viz 'is gr-r-reat friend Major Maurewarde. Ah, but impossible, I say, on account of ze *cérémonie* in ze park.

GERALDINE.

We don't leave the house till half-past eleven, Mademoiselle. [*To FILMER.*] His brain is excited.

NINA.

[*Advancing.*] Dereek's new schoolroom?

GERALDINE.

[*To MLLE. THOMÉ.*] Tell him he may have half an hour there before we start. [*Going to the nearer door.*] I'll tell him.

NINA.

[*With an alteration in her manner.*] His new school-room? What room?

MLLE. THOMÉ.

'Is poor mamma's boudoir, *vous savez.*

NINA.

The boudoir! [*To FILMER.*] Filmer!

FILMER.

Dr. Watson strongly disapproves of Derek's school-room here.

NINA.

Why?

GERALDINE.

[*Who has halted at the door.*] The aspect is unsuitable.

NINA.

[*Going toward her.*] When did Dr. Watson say so?

GERALDINE.

[*Leaving the door.*] This morning. It gets no sun till the afternoon.

NINA.

The boudoir ——?

GERALDINE.

Faces east and south.

NINA.

There's a room above the boudoir with precisely the same lookout.

GERALDINE.

A bedroom.

NINA.

It's seldom occupied; it could be turned into a school-room.

GERALDINE.

We consider it fitting that his mother's room should be handed over to Derek.

NINA.

We?

GERALDINE.

[*To FILMER.*] Filmer —

FILMER.

Geraldine and I came to the conclusion that it was the simplest way of meeting Watson's wishes.

NINA.

[*To FILMER.*] How often have I begged you to allow me the right of using Annabel's boudoir?

FILMER.

I—I objected to—to your dogs.

NINA.

No, no; I gave you my sacred word I'd keep them out of the house. No, it isn't that. [*Confronting GERALDINE.*] This is a trick—nothing but a trick —!

FILMER.

Be silent!

GERALDINE.

[*To Mlle. Thomé, commandingly.*] Mademoiselle —

Mlle. Thomé.

Mais oui, certainement —

[*She withdraws hastily at the further door.* MAUREWARDE has already disappeared.

NINA.

[*Pointing to GERALDINE.*] A mean trick of hers! She knew there was a chance—just a chance—a danger—of my being given the key of her sister's boudoir some day, if I behaved myself decently; and so she has managed to push Derek in there, to spite me and shut me out of it for good and all!

SIR DANIEL.

FILMER —

PRYCE.

Upon my soul!

LADY RIDGELEY.

[*Joining* SIR DANIEL and PRYCE.] Dan!

FILMER.

Nina!

NINA.

[*Sitting in the chair by the settee on the right.*] Heavens above us! I wasn't even told—not even told! Did you mention it at lunch, any of you? Not you! It leaks out! It's shameful—infamous!

FILMER.

[*To* NINA.] You are beside yourself.

NINA.

Ha!

FILMER.

To-morrow you will be sorry —

NINA

To-morrow! The park! [*Starting to her feet and addressing everybody but* HILARY.] Ah, yes, there's one bit of revenge I can take; there's one slight I can put on you! I go to no park to-morrow; as God hears me, I do not! There's no possible indignity that hasn't been heaped on me, and in return I'll show my contempt—show it publicly by my absence!—my contempt for your park and those connected with it! Good-night!

[*She goes out at the further door.* LADY RIDGELEY sinks into a chair by the piano.

SIR DANIEL.

Geraldine —

[GERALDINE hurries to LADY RIDGELEY and holds her hand. FILMER sits upon the settee on the right, with a set face.]

HILARY.

[Seating himself in the chair by the settee on the left.]
Filmer —

FILMER.

[Sternly.] Yes?

HILARY.

[As if about to re-tell his story.] When I was in Paris, in my young days, I used to dine constantly at the house of a friend in the Rue de Chaillot —

FILMER.

[Rising, with a stamp of the foot, and walking away.]
Hilary —!

PRYCE.

[Coming to HILARY, in a rage.] Look here, Jesson —!

END OF THE SECOND ACT

THE THIRD ACT

The scene represents an inner hall, handsomely but soberly decorated. In the wall at the back, on the right, a wide double-door opens into the room from a spacious outer hall. In the left-hand wall, shaped to the panels of the wainscot, a smaller door gives admittance to a passage. Beyond this door is the fireplace, opposite which, in the right-hand wall, a bay-window affords a view of the portico of the house and the carriage-drive. The furniture is of oak. On the right and left of the fireplace there is an armchair; facing the fireplace is a settee, and behind the settee are a chair and a small round table. Against the back wall, in the centre, stands an escritoire with a stool, serving the purpose of a writing-chair, before it; and against the wall on the right, one on either side of the window, are two fine cabinets. Also on the right, but set out into the room, is an oblong table on which books of reference, magazines, and newspapers are arranged methodically. There is a chair on the left of this table, another at the further end of it; and on the right of the table, facing the window, a settee. Other chairs and cabinets are ranged round the room to fill the spaces not provided for in this description.

Logs are laid in the open-grate, but there is no fire. Sunlight enters at the window. The double-door is open, showing the outer hall.

[SIR DANIEL is seated at the further end, LADY RIDGELEY on the left, of the oblong table, and

PRYCE upon the settee facing the window. SIR DANIEL and PRYCE are reading the newspaper. LADY RIDGELEY, her spectacles upon her nose and a newspaper in her lap, is lost in gloomy abstraction. The three are in mourning, dressed for the approaching ceremony. GERALDINE, similarly attired, appears in the outer hall, coming from the left. They turn to her eagerly as she enters.

SIR DANIEL.

Well?

GERALDINE.

[Fastening some jet bracelets upon her wrist.] He has gone to her.

LADY RIDGELEY.

To insist ——?

GERALDINE.

To insist upon her leaving her room.

PRYCE.

[Who is smoking a cigar—dissatisfied.] Leaving her room!

GERALDINE.

And coming down-stairs.

SIR DANIEL.

That is not enough, surely?

LADY RIDGELEY.

Doesn't he demand that she shall attend the ceremony?

PRYCE.

And that she apologizes for her conduct?

GERALDINE.

All in good time. She must first be taught that she cannot insult people and then run away and hide.

[HILARY appears in the outer hall, coming from the right. He is in tweed clothes and is smoking a pipe.]

HILARY.

[Looking into the room, cheerfully.] Good-morning.

[The RIDGELEYS murmur a formal response. SIR DANIEL, LADY RIDGELEY and PRYCE resume reading, and GERALDINE seats herself upon the settee before the fireplace. Leaving his cap and stick in the outer hall, HILARY enters.]

HILARY.

[Shaking hands with LADY RIDGELEY, who gives him two fingers, and with GERALDINE who is equally distant.] Sorry I didn't turn up at breakfast. I had an early cup of tea and a biscuit, and went for a walk. [Sitting in the chair behind the settee on the left.] Glorious weather. [After a silence, during which he keeps his pipe alight.] Any news?

SIR DANIEL.

The *Times* has a paragraph about the opening of the park to-day.

PRYCE.

Yes, and a mean, stingy paragraph it is. Don't know what's happening to that paper.

HILARY.

[Looking at his watch.] Carriages at half past eleven, eh? [Cautiously.] Did Filmer breakfast down-stairs?

SIR DANIEL.

Yes.

HILARY.

And—er—Mrs. Nina?

SIR DANIEL.

No.

LADY RIDGELEY.

No, she did not.

GERALDINE.

No.

PRYCE.

No, she didn't.

[FILMER enters at the door on the left. He is dressed for the ceremony, almost entirely in black. SIR DANIEL, LADY RIDGELEY and PRYCE lay their newspapers aside and PRYCE and GERALDINE rise.]

FILMER.

[Nodding to HILARY.] How are you, Hilary?

HILARY.

How are you, old man?

GERALDINE.

[Moving to the centre.] Nina is not here, Filmer.

FILMER.

[Going to her.] She will be.

GERALDINE.

We start in less than three-quarters of an hour.

FILMER.

[*Referring to a crumpled note which he takes from his pocket.*] She says, "as soon as I am dressed."

GERALDINE.

Dressed for the ceremony?

FILMER.

I hope so; I take it to be so.

[SIR DANIEL, LADY RIDGELEY, and PRYCE draw a long breath and incline their heads in approbation.]

GERALDINE.

[*To FILMER, pointing to the note.*] She writes to you?

FILMER.

In answer to a letter from me.

GERALDINE.

[*Surprised.*] You haven't seen her, then?

FILMER.

[*Stiffly.*] No, I am not a person who intrudes himself upon a lady, even though the lady be his wife.

GERALDINE.

[*Feeling the rebuff.*] Forgive me. I was under the impression——

SIR DANIEL.

[*Interposing.*] Perhaps a letter was wisest in the circumstances.

[GERALDINE joins PRYCE, on the right, as SIR DANIEL rises and advances to FILMER. HILARY has risen and moved to the fireplace, where he is now standing, taking pulls at his pipe.]

SIR DANIEL.

My dear Filmer, I am relieved—we are all greatly relieved—by your wife's change of demeanor. Her vacant chair at the breakfast-table had not prepared me for it.

HILARY.

[*Dryly.*] Oh, yes, Sir Daniel, you'll find Mrs. Nina quite reasonable, approach her the right way.

LADY RIDGELEY.

Reasonable !

SIR DANIEL.

The right way ?

HILARY.

With a little gentleness and forbearance—as I guess old Filmer has done.

SIR DANIEL.

[*Severely.*] I cordially sympathize with such treatment, Mr. Jesson——

LADY RIDGELEY.

And follow it——

SIR DANIEL.

Given the opportunity. [*Turning to* LADY RIDGELEY.] It is your wish, Harriet, I am sure, that Mrs. Filmer should occupy the seat next to you in the carriage ?

LADY RIDGELEY.

Certainly.

FILMER.

[*To* LADY RIDGELEY.] Thank you.

SIR DANIEL.

Both going and returning ?

LADY RIDGELEY.

If it pleases her.

FILMER.

She will be most gratified.

LADY RIDGELEY.

I own it would make the drive easier to me if the young lady could first be induced to express her regret—her contrition——

HILARY.

[*Appealingly.*] Ah, Lady Ridgeley!

LADY RIDGELEY.

Not for the affront to ourselves—that I pardon freely—but for her heartless reference to the one who has gone.

FILMER.

Reference to —— ?

HILARY.

[*Advancing to the centre.*] Sir Daniel !

SIR DANIEL.

[*Mildly.*] Mr. Jesson ?

HILARY.

I had the misfortune to be present last night ——

FILMER.

I agree with my brother. I haven't the faintest recollection that Nina, even in the extreme heat of temper ——

LADY RIDGELEY.

You don't remember —— ? [To SIR DANIEL.]
Dan ——

SIR DANIEL.

[Quoting.] "I will show my contempt ——" [To LADY RIDGELEY.] Correct me, Harriet. "I will show my contempt—show it publicly by my absence—my contempt for your park and for those concerned in it."

LADY RIDGELEY.

"Connected with it."

SIR DANIEL.

"Connected with it." [To everybody.] Who is connected with this beautiful park so closely as our dear An-nabel?

HILARY.

Ah, no, no; no, no. Why put that construction upon her words?

FILMER.

[Walking away to the fireplace.] When a more lenient one is admissible?

SIR DANIEL.

[With a gentle shrug.] Indeed? [To HILARY.] I am a self-educated man, Mr. Jesson ——

LADY RIDGELEY.

We are plain, straightforward people.

SIR DANIEL.

And my ignorance restricts me to attaching to a word or a phrase the significance supplied by common sense. Language which can be interpreted according to convenience is not for such as myself.

PRYCE.

[*Standing beside GERALDINE, who is now seated at the oblong table—prompting SIR DANIEL.*] *Davus sum non Edipus*, father.

SIR DANIEL.

[*Glancing at PRYCE with pride.*] I have not had the advantages I have been able to give my children. [*To HILARY, pointedly.*] Fables, for instance—stories professing to deal with French gentry and—ah—their cooks are beyond my simple comprehension. But this I have learned in the course of a long life ; *this*, sir —

HILARY.

Yes ?

SIR DANIEL.

Learned it to my sorrow—that where any word or act admits of more than one construction, it is generally safe to put the worst upon it.

LADY RIDGELEY.

[*Assentingly.*] Ah !

HILARY.

Then all I can say, Sir Daniel—and I say it very respectfully—is that I hope I shall not live to be venerable.

SIR DANIEL.

No, you don't hope that, sir. There again you are indulging in an empty figure of speech —

GERALDINE.

[*Suddenly, listening.*] Father —

SIR DANIEL.

Eh ?

GERALDINE.

[*Rising.*] I think —

[*There is a movement of preparation for the reception of NINA. SIR DANIEL seats himself before the escritoire and is joined by PRYCE. HILARY retires to the back as GERALDINE looks into the outer hall.*

GERALDINE.

[*Recoiling.*] Oh!

[*NINA is seen in the outer hall, coming from the left. She is gaily dressed, in a pretty gown of bright pink. Her face is pale, as from sleeplessness, but in her eyes and about her mouth there is a set look of determination. She pauses in the doorway.*

GERALDINE.

Nina!

FILMER.

Good heaven!

HILARY.

[*Under his breath.*] *Belcebú!*

[*NINA advances firmly. SIR DANIEL rises, clutching PRYCE's arm, and LADY RIDGELEY stares at her in horror.*

NINA.

[*To FILMER, who is speechless.*] You have asked me to come down-stairs. Here I am.

LADY RIDGELEY.

[*Rising.*] Geraldine —

GERALDINE.

[*Hurrying to her.*] Mother dear —

HILARY.

[*At NINA's side.*] What the devil —— !

NINA.

[*Turning upon him fiercely.*] Mr. Jesson !

FILMER.

Explain this.

NINA.

[*To FILMER.*] Explain what ?

FILMER.

The meaning of the abominable dress you are wearing.
Why are you not in dark colors ?

NINA.

Why ? Because I see no reason why I should be.

FILMER.

[*Approaching her.*] You can't drive to the park in that
guise.

NINA.

No ? Can't I ?

GERALDINE.

Filmer, don't you grasp —— ?

NINA.

Yes, don't you grasp that I am fully determined *not* to
drive to the park with you ? Didn't I announce my re-
solve last night ?

LADY RIDGELEY.

Dan ——

NINA.

Haven't I made myself clear ? I am determined, not

only that I won't accompany you to the park to-day, but that I will never set foot in it. I'd die rather.

[LADY RIDGELEY goes to SIR DANIEL as PRYCE advances. NINA sits in the chair behind the settee on the left, her clenched hand resting upon the table beside her.

PRYCE.

Filmer —

HILARY.

[*Pacifically.*] Wait, wait, wait, wait. Hold hard, Ridgeley. [*To FILMER.*] My dear Filmer, you say you wrote to Nina this morning?

FILMER.

I wrote.

NINA.

Oh, yes, Filmer wrote. The letter is up-stairs, on my dressing-table. Would anybody care to read it?

FILMER.

[*Crossing to GERALDINE.*] Geraldine, the servants —!

[*GERALDINE runs out, passing through the outer hall and disappearing on the left.*

HILARY.

[*His eyes following FILMER keenly.*] The letter contains a strong, personal appeal, in affectionate terms —

NINA.

Affectionate! It contains the statement that I have grossly insulted certain people, and a request that I should eat humble pie—eat it, top crust and all.

FILMER.

No, no.

NINA.

I beg pardon—make complete and immediate reparation.

HILARY.

Really? [*Screwing up his face.*] Is that your letter, Filmer?

FILMER.

[*To HILARY.*] In effect. The form of it is not, perhaps, precisely what you surmised; but I do not, myself, consider it wanting in courtesy or moderation.

NINA.

[*Softly.*] Ha, ha, ha, ha!

FILMER.

[*Sitting, on the left of the oblong table.*] However, that is my letter, briefly.

NINA.

Briefly! Yes! There are two whole sheets of courtesy and moderation. It's eminently Filmerish.

HILARY.

Well, well, well, well! Then it comes to this. [*Significantly.*] Filmer has yet to make his appeal to Nina—his appeal on personal grounds—*ab imo pectore*, eh, Ridgeley —?

PRYCE.

[*Looking at his watch sneeringly.*] Yes, he still has time to demonstrate how reasonable Mrs. Jesson can be. [*Joining SIR DANIEL and LADY RIDGELEY.*] Pish! Come away, mother.

NINA.

[*Turning in her chair sharply.*] No, no; stop, please!

Don't you imagine, any of you, that Filmer can talk me over, lecture me like a naughty child till I'm all tears and obedience. That sort of thing is at an end, believe me.

HILARY.

[*Coaxingly.*] Nina, Nina, Nina — !

NINA.

Ah, Nina, Nina, Nina ! Or you, Mr. Jesson ! I'm not to be influenced by your arguments either.

HILARY.

Never mind me for the moment. Nina, for Filmer's sake — !

NINA.

[*Passionately, addressing HILARY but aiming her words at FILMER.*] Oh, I know what upsets Filmer so—why everybody is in such a ferment. Is it because they've a particle of affection for me, because they reckon me one of themselves, that they are disturbed by my refusing to assist at the opening of the park ? Not it. Filmer is dejected simply because of the gossip my absence will give rise to—the scandal. There's a screw loose somewhere, people will remark—those who haven't arrived at that conclusion already. And the newspapers ! He foresees the nasty innuendo in the newspaper reports !

FILMER.

I do, plainly.

NINA.

"The party did not include the present Mrs. Filmer Jesson" ! "The charming lady who is now Mrs. Filmer Jesson was not upon the platform" !

FILMER.

[*Tortured by the idea.*] Ah——![*He transfers himself to the settee facing the window, where he sits beating the floor with his foot.*

HILARY has moved away to the fireplace, while NINA has been speaking, and is standing there with his back to those in the room.

NINA.

[*Jumping up and confronting the three RIDGELEYS.*] And you—Lady Ridgeley and Sir Daniel—and you, Mr. Pryce—and Geraldine—why, you detest me, loathe the sight of me!

LADY RIDGELEY.

Dan!

SIR DANIEL.

Madam——

PRYCE.

Hold your tongue, father.

NINA.

You are all upset because you are deprived of the gratification of inflicting a grand, crowning humiliation upon me; because you can't drag me to the park and exhibit me to the quizzing crowd, saying to yourselves, "See! We've brought the failure with us; we have brought with us Mr. Filmer Jesson's matrimonial blunder; to do homage to Annabel Mary Ridgeley that was, whose shoe-strings she is not worthy to have tied"! Oh, thank God, I can rob you of that triumph, at least!

[*She paces the room, panting.*] LADY RIDGELEY advances to her tremblingly.

LADY RIDGELEY.

[*To NINA.*] You—you are not fit to enter the park; you—you would disgrace it.

SIR DANIEL.

[*Drawing* LADY RIDGELEY away and addressing FILMER, sternly.] Filmer—[FILMER rises] we shall assemble here punctually at the half-hour. A truce to rioting and vulgar abuse. Let those who *do* go to the park to-day, go there in a decent and becoming spirit. [*To* LADY RIDGELEY.] Harriet—

[*Preceded by* PRYCE, LADY RIDGELEY and SIR DANIEL *pass into the outer hall and disappear on the left.* FILMER *follows them to the door and closes it.* NINA *seats herself in the chair on the left of the oblong table.* HILARY *comes to her.*

HILARY.

[*To* NINA.] My little friend—[*she turns to him*] this is a thousand pities.

NINA.

A thousand ? a million !

HILARY.

Permit me—will you ?—permit me to acquaint you with an indisputable fact.

NINA.

Which is — ?

HILARY.

You have gone and put yourself in the wrong, my dear.

NINA.

Indeed ? And I am so frequently in the right !

HILARY.

Your outburst of last night was pardonable —

NINA,

Thanks.

HILARY.

It was unpremeditated, obviously unprepared. But, after a night's rest ——

NINA.

Rest! [*A pause.*] Rest!

HILARY.

[*Looking into her face.*] You—you haven't slept very soundly?

NINA.

[*Brushing her hand across her eyes.*] Ha!

HILARY.

After a night's reflection, then ——?

NINA.

That's better.

HILARY.

After a night's reflection ——

NINA.

[*Rising.*] After a night's reflection, to dare to come down-stairs—a woman!

HILARY.

A woman?

NINA.

Having only yesterday been a browbeaten, submissive girl! Inexcusable!

HILARY.

There can be no valid objection to a girl becoming a woman at any moment she, with the sympathetic assistance of nature, selects. But if you *will* assume, at short notice, and on this exceptional occasion, the mantle of womanhood ——

NINA.

It shouldn't be pink, you think?

HILARY.

[*Good-humoredly.*] Exactly. It shouldn't be so bright a pink. [*With an alteration of manner.*] Recollect, my dear Nina—recollect, this *is* the anniversary of an event which is genuinely mourned —

NINA.

[*Walking away to the right.*] Oh!

HILARY.

By some with less outward manifestation than by others —

NINA.

[*Halting by the settee.*] Mr. Jesson, for patience' sake, have done with the subject of mourning for the late Mrs. Filmer, finally. I *feel* no mourning, and wear none. I didn't know the poor lady—hadn't the honor; but this I do say—that, with all my soul, I wish she had remained on earth.

HILARY.

[*Turning from her, repelled by her cynicism.*] Ah —!

NINA.

No, this is not a question of the dead, but of the living. The living have claims as well as the dead. I am, unfortunately, living; [*sitting at the further end of the oblong table*] and I swear that all of you combined—you, my husband, and the Ridgeleys—sha'n't compel me to observe this anniversary as any other than an ordinary day in the calendar.

[FILMER, who has been sitting moodily upon the settee on the left, rises indignantly.

HILARY.

[*With a shrug.*] Well! [*At her side again.*] May I add one thing —?

NINA.

Yes?

HILARY.

That I am—disappointed?

NINA.

In me? [*He bows slightly.*] So be it. [*Offering him her hand.*] Good-bye.

HILARY.

[*Taking her hand.*] Good-bye?

NINA.

To the friend who promised never to "chuck" me.

HILARY.

The promise was made to the girl.

NINA.

Not to the woman. [*Withdrawing her hand.*] My dogs are left me.

[*He hesitates, then moves to the door on the left.*]

HILARY.

[*To FILMER, in passing.*] I'll go and dress.

NINA.

[*Calling after him, a ring of mockery in her voice.*] Ah, yes; you have to get into your black, haven't you?

HILARY.

[*At the door, turning to her.*] No, not black.

NINA.

No?

HILARY.

Nor pink.

[He departs, closing the door behind him emphatically. With a light laugh and a great air of indifference, she rises and, taking up a newspaper, reseats herself upon the settee facing the window.]

FILMER.

[Advancing to the middle of the room.] You understand that this is defiance—open defiance?

NINA.

Perfectly.

FILMER.

[After a short silence, irresolutely resolute.] You—you are incurring a serious responsibility, Nina.

NINA.

I accept the responsibility. *[Her eyes falling upon the paragraph referred to by SIR DANIEL.]* "Gift of a park. The park which Mr. Filmer Jesson —"

[She flings the newspaper from her, and, rising again, picks up another.]

FILMER.

You must recognize that the continuation of our life together is rendered possible only by your willingness to yield to authority.

NINA.

Yours and your deputy's?

FILMER.

By my "deputy," I presume you allude to Geraldine?

NINA.

[*Sitting in the chair on the left of the oblong table.*]
Whom else?

FILMER.

Geraldine is no more than my mouthpiece. In domestic affairs she simply echoes my voice.

NINA.

[*From behind the newspaper.*] For the future, I decline to listen to the voice or the echo.

FILMER.

I warn you. You will drive me to reconsider my entire position, to seek the best advice I can procure.

NINA.

The Ridgeley family will be delighted to advise you.

FILMER.

[*With a wave of the hand.*] The advice of disinterested persons. I have warned you. [*He goes to the door on the right, wavers, and returns to her.*] Nina, won't you spare me the embarrassment, the distress, of being obliged to adopt that course? [*Earnestly.*] I do make a strong, personal appeal to you; I do, notwithstanding the uncompromising position you take up. [*He sits at the further end of the table. She lowers her paper.*] I go so far as to admit that there may be some minor points of variance between us which are capable of adjustment—adjustment in your favor. It may be that too many sacrifices have been made to ensure strict order and regularity in my household; I do not positively say it is so, but it may be. Having conceded this, I entreat you—let us postpone further discussion of the subject until to-morrow.

NINA.

Until to-morrow?

FILMER.

Or any other time you appoint.

NINA.

And to-day? [*A pause.*] To-day?

FILMER.

Change your dress and come to the park. [*She grips her newspaper fiercely.*] My dear Nina——

NINA.

[*Throwing the paper aside and rising.*] I thought as much! No! [*Walking away.*] I won't. I won't. I won't.

FILMER.

[*Rising.*] Ah! [*At the door, turning to her.*] If anything was wanting to add to my self-reproach, intensify it, this morning's revelation of your real character has supplied it.

NINA.

[*Facing him.*] Your self-reproach? For having fallen desperately in love with your boy's governess?

FILMER.

[*Raising a hand.*] Silence!

NINA.

Ah, you may be ashamed to acknowledge it—but you were faithless to your Annabel for a little while. You were! [*Moving toward him tauntingly.*] You did forget Annabel and make love—love—love—to the poor, dependent governess for a month or two. You did; you did!

FILMER.

I *am* ashamed to acknowledge it. And I would will-

ingly give ten years of my life to blot out the act of weakness. Willingly!

[He leaves her, shutting the door upon her.]

NINA.

[Hysterically.] Ho! Oh! oh——!

[Hearing footsteps outside the door on the left, she pulls herself together. Presently the door opens and DEREK enters. He carries a small leather bag—a lady's "reticule"—which is much discolored and mildewed. The boy is dressed for the ceremony, but his mourning clothes are partly covered by a blouse.]

DEREK.

[On his way to the escritoire.] Hallo, Nina!

NINA.

[Swallowing her tears.] Hallo!

DEREK.

[Looking her up and down.] Why, you oughtn't to be wearing that smart frock this morning.

NINA.

So they inform me.

DEREK.

Of course you oughtn't. You'd better go and dress at once. You'll be late; that's what it will end in.

[He deposits the little bag upon the table on the left and, going to the escritoire, prepares to write a letter.]

NINA.

Would it surprise you to hear that I am not coming to the park to-day?

DEREK.

What, won't they take you?

NINA.

Oh, they're most anxious to do so. [*Moving over to the left.*] But I've offered to stay behind, to guard the happy home.

DEREK.

[*Turning to her.*] You've been troublesome again, I s'pose, Nina, if you spoke the truth?

NINA.

Ha! Tra, la, la!

DEREK.

Oh, dear me! What a worry you are to father and Aunt Geraldine! [*Sitting at the escritoire and selecting a pen.*] How do you spell rep-re-hend-able?

NINA.

Repre — ? Reprehensible, do you mean?

DEREK.

That's it; repre-hensible. [*Commencing his letter.*] I am extremely angry with Maurry and I am giving him a word of my mind.

NINA.

[*Near the boy.*] What has Major Maurewarde done to offend?

DEREK.

[*Writing laboriously.*] He has broke an engagement with me.

NINA.

Broken an engagement.

DEREK.

All right; you're not my governess now, Nina.

NINA.

No!

DEREK.

[*To her.*] Maurry has treated me in a most ungentlemanly, reprehensible—reprehensible way. I invited him to meet me in poor mamma's boudoir—my new schoolroom, you know —

NINA.

I know.

DEREK.

Directly after breakfast—to help me arrange my books; and he excepted.

NINA.

Accepted. Well?

DEREK.

Well, he just peeped into the room and looked round; and then he walked away quickly, as if he'd seen a —
[*Breaking off, struck by the idea which enters his head, and continuing in another tone.*] There's no such things as ghosts, are there, Nina?

NINA.

Ghosts? I've never seen one. The good, or bad, that people do lives after them. That's the only sort of ghost there is, I suspect.

DEREK.

[*Nursing his knee, thoughtfully.*] Besides, Maurry's a man; and if I could be in poor mamma's room—and alone —! [*Resuming his writing.*] No, I don't allow such behavior from Maurry.

NINA.

[*Picking up the little bag with her finger and thumb.*]
What's this, Derek?

DEREK.

[*Over his shoulder.*] That? Oh, that's poor mama's.

NINA.

[*Replacing the bag and brushing the dust from her fingers.* Your mother's?

DEREK.

I s'pose it was hers. I'm going to ask father.

NINA.

Where did you find it?

DEREK.

In the boudoir, underneath the boards at the bottom of the cupboard.

NINA.

[*Taking up the bag again and examining it.*] Underneath the boards — ?

DEREK.

The big cupboard with the roses painted on the door.
[*Leaving the escritoire, holding his pen in one hand and sheet of note-paper in the other, and standing beside NINA.*] I was putting my books away there neatly, and I saw a tiny mouse run through a crack in the floor. And when I slipped my hand in, to get at the mouse, I touched *that*. The board came up quite easily —

NINA.

The mice *have* been gnawing at it.

DEREK.

Is there anything inside, Nina?

NINA.

[*Pinching the bag.*] I can't tell you.

DEREK.

It won't open. I've tried. [*Returning to the escritoire.*]
Talking to you is not writing my letter.[*He proceeds with his writing and she sits, in the chair behind the settee on the left, pressing the fastening of the bag.*]

DEREK.

[*Writing.*] "—r-e-p-r-e—" Go on, Nina.

NINA.

R-e-p-r-e-h-e-n —

DEREK.

"—h-e-n —"

NINA.

—s-i —

DEREK.

"—s-i —"

NINA.

—b-l-e.

DEREK.

"—b-l-e." [*As he writes.*] Thanks. It's a good word, isn't it, Nina? It's one of father's.[*Suddenly, she succeeds in opening the bag. After peeping into it, she inserts her hand. She withdraws her hand guiltily, but again inserts it and produces a few faded letters. Glancing at the handwriting of the letters, which are unenclosed, her eyes are instantly arrested and her lips part in amazement.*]

DEREK.

[*Blotting his letter.*] Listen to this, Nina —

[*She starts, and hides the letters in her lap. Finding, however, that the boy doesn't turn his head, and that he goes on with his reading, she devours the contents of one of them.*

DEREK.

[*Reading.*] "My dear Maurry. I am surprised at your conduct this morning. A engagement——" [*correcting his mistake*] An engagement—— [*continuing*] "An engagement is an engagement, and breaking it is a very reprehensible thing to do. I will finish my books myself and perhaps some day you will be sorry. Your affectionate friend——"

NINA.

[*Involuntarily.*] Oh!

DEREK.

[*Half turning.*] Eh?

NINA.

[*Hastily, again concealing the letters.*] Capital, Derek. Oh, that's capital, capital—ripping!

DEREK.

[*Selecting an envelope—severely.*] I don't know about ripping, Nina; and I don't think father would sanction the expression. But I'm glad you approve. [*Addressing an envelope.*] It will be a lesson to Maurry, won't it?

[*While the boy is occupied, she refastens the bag and lays it on the table beside her. Then, swiftly and stealthily, she moves over to the settee facing the window. There she sits and reads the rest of the letters with avidity.*

DEREK.

[*Surveying at arm's length, the envelope he has ad-*

dressed.] "Major Guy Maurewarde, D.S.O. Care of Father, M.P. Overbury Towers." [*Blotting the envelope and inclosing his letter.*] Poor Maurry! [*Turning to the chair NINA has vacated.*] Nina—[*discovering that she is seated at the other side of the room*] Nina —

NINA.

[*Absorbed.*] Yes—yes —?

DEREK.

You'd forgive Maurry this afternoon, if you were me, wouldn't you?

NINA.

Of course—of course —

DEREK.

[*Leaving the escritoire, with his letter.*] I'll ask Blyth to take it to the poor man at once.

[*He picks up the little bag and is going toward the outer hall when NINA rises.*

NINA.

[*Uttering a sharp cry.*] Ah!

DEREK.

[*Startled.*] Nina! [*Holding the letters behind her, she comes to him.*] What's the matter with you?

NINA.

[*Supporting his chin with her hand and scrutinising his features—in a strange voice.*] Let me have a look at you!

[*Mlle. Thomé opens the door on the left.*

Mlle. Thomé.

[*Seeing DEREK.*] Ah! [*Entering, in a fluster.*] Dere you are!

[MLLE. THOMÉ is wearing her hat, and, save for her gloves, which she is carrying, is fully dressed for the ceremony. Her attire is appropriate, with the added elegance of a Frenchwoman. She seizes DEREK and shakes him.

MLLE. THOMÉ.

Vilain petit étourdi !

DEREK.

Don't!

MLLE. THOMÉ.

Vous tournerez mal !

DEREK.

[Escaping from her and getting away to the left.] Leave off! How dare you, both of you!

MLLE. THOMÉ.

[Striking him harmlessly across the shoulders with her gloves.] I 'unt for you up-stairs and down-stairs. Vilmot is waiting for you 'alf an hour.

DEREK.

More stupid Wilmot. [Lifting his blouse and displaying his suit of black clothes.] I'm ready.

MLLE. THOMÉ.

Ready! You! Vat of your 'air? Vat of your 'ands?

DEREK.

[Stamping his foot.] Sound your h's! Sound your h's!

MLLE. THOMÉ.

[Grasping the collar of his blouse.] *Méchant !*

[She is leading the boy toward the door on the right when she encounters NINA, who is standing, with eyes ablaze, quivering with excitement.

MLLE. THOMÉ.

[Releasing DEREK.] *Mon Dieu !*

DEREK.

[Indignantly.] Yes, *mon Dieu, mon Dieu, mon Dieu !*
[Pointing at NINA.] *Regardez 'er !*

MLLE. THOMÉ.

Vy are you dressed like zis, Madame Jesson? *Qu'est-ce qu'il y a donc ?* Don't you come viz us?

NINA.

[Still hiding the letters behind her.] No, I do not.

MLLE. THOMÉ.

No! [Embracing NINA.] *Excusez-moi. Pauvre chère amie!* You are in disgrace again, eh?

NINA.

[Drawing back, with a queer laugh.] Disgrace! Ha, ha, ha!

MLLE. THOMÉ.

Ah, I am so vairy grieved for you.

NINA.

Don't be. You needn't be. [Walking over to the left, now clutching the letters in front of her.] Grieve for the others, Mademoiselle.

MLLE. THOMÉ.

For ze uzzers? Oh, yes, *vraiment*; [sighing] for ze relations of ze good Madame Annabel. [To DEREK.] *Allons ! venez, venez !*

[DEREK and MLLE. THOMÉ go out, leaving the door open, and pass through the outer hall. Almost immediately, HILARY'S voice is heard. NINA, who has seated herself upon the settee facing the fireplace, and is again hungrily reading the letters, raises her head sharply.]

HILARY.

[*Meeting DEREK and Mlle. THOMÉ in the outer hall.*]
Hallo, Derek! What have you been up to this morning?

DEREK.

Arranging my books in my new schoolroom.

Mlle. THOMÉ.

Mille pardons, monsieur; do not detain 'im.

DEREK.

No; look at my 'ands, look at my 'air.

HILARY.

You've twenty minutes yet, mademoiselle. Cut along, old fellow.

NINA.

[*Running to the open door and calling to HILARY.*] Mr. Jesson! Mr. Jesson!

[*She is standing in the middle of the room when HILARY, faultlessly dressed in dark gray, appears in the doorway.*]

HILARY.

[*Courteously.*] Did you call me?

NINA.

Yes. [*As he enters.*] Shut the door; shut the door.

[*He obeys, surprised at her manner and by the look in her face.*]

HILARY.

[*Approaching her.*] Yes?

NINA.

[*In a low voice, rapidly.*] A few minutes ago the child—Derek—came in here to write a note to Major Maure-

warde. He had a little bag in his hand—a bag such as women usually carry. It was all mildewed, and stained, and nibbled at the corners by mice. He laid it down—on this table—and I asked whose it was. It belonged to his mother, he said; at any rate he had found it in his new schoolroom—her boudoir—under the flooring of a cupboard.

HILARY.

Indeed?

NINA.

He was alone in the room, putting his books away in the cupboard, and he noticed a mouse disappear between the boards. Boylike, he lifted up one of the boards—it must have been conveniently loose—and discovered the bag. He had tried to open it, and hadn't succeeded; but while he was sitting—there—writing, I opened it and examined what was in it.

HILARY.

[*Raising his eyebrows.*] You did?

NINA.

Why not? I had no suspicion I should light upon anything disagreeable.

HILARY.

Disagreeable?

NINA.

Anything *she* had meant to hide. It didn't occur to me—underneath the floor, in her *sanctum*—— /

HILARY.

And what *did* you come upon? [*Checking her as she is about to reply.*] No. No, no; I've no wish to hear.

NINA.

But you must hear. You have to hear. [*Distinctly.*]
Some letters.

HILARY.

Ah?

NINA.

These four letters. [*A pause.*] I've read them.

HILARY.

[*Frowning.*] You've read them?

NINA.

The handwriting first attracted me ; and then a sentence
caught my eye—and I read them through.

HILARY.

[*Disdainfully, half-turning from her.*] Tsch!

NINA.

[*Hotly.*] Scandalous, isn't it? At the same time, I
advise you not to waste your scorn on me, Mr. Jesson—
that is, unless you've an unlimited stock of it at your dis-
posal. [*Fingering the letters.*] They are from Major
Maurewarde.

HILARY.

[*With polite indifference.*] From Major Maurewarde?

NINA.

To her.

HILARY.

I dare say.

NINA.

Such letters!

HILARY.

Major Maurewarde is a very old and close friend of my brother ——

NINA.

Friend !

HILARY.

And of mine. We regard him—you know it as well as I do—we regard him almost as a member of our family.

NINA.

Almost !

HILARY.

I can quite understand, Mrs. Filmer, that your present frame of mind disposes you to detect evil in matters of a perfectly innocent kind ——

NINA.

Innocent ! Oh, why beat about the bush ? This immaculate lady ; the sainted Annabel—your stained-glass-window sister-in-law ——

HILARY.

[*Quietly.*] For shame !

NINA.

She was nothing but Maurewarde's—woman. [*There is a pause, during which neither moves.*] Yes, and Derek—the boy—is his son.

HILARY.

[*After a further pause, advancing to her and looking at her fixedly.*] If a man said this, Mrs. Filmer—any man living ——

NINA.

[*Returning his gaze unflinchingly, with a slight shrug.*]

You could hit him in the face. But that wouldn't alter facts, would it?

[She moves to the further end of the oblong table. Seating herself at the table, she clears a space in front of her and proceeds to arrange the letters in some sequence.]

NINA.

[To HILARY, imperatively.] Mr. Jesson.

[Reluctantly, he goes to her. She motions him to sit by her. He draws away the chair from the left of the table and does so. Side by side, their elbows together, they examine the letters.]

NINA.

They are written upon the Towers note-paper.

HILARY.

How can that have been? He must have been staying with them, in that case.

NINA.

He was; but she was avoiding him—wouldn't be left alone with him. You'll see presently. "Monday ——"
[Handing him a letter.] I fancy that comes first.

[They read, she looking over his shoulder, their lips moving in unison.]

HILARY.

Yes, I see.

NINA.

[Pointing to a passage in the letter.] There. *[He reads on, mumbling the words to himself.]* He was pressing her to go off with him.

HILARY.

[Hushing her.] Ssh, ssh! *[Almost inaudibly.]* "We

have never wanted for pluck, Bel, you and I. But these past six or seven years . . . these past six or seven years . . . have been hell upon earth. They have pretty well broke both of us . . . pretty well broke both of us. And all for what? For this cursed sham of respectability. Bel, dearest——"

[Finally he throws the letter back to her and she places another before him.]

NINA.

Number Two, I think. *[He reads.]* Or Three. There's no day on either of these. *[Giving him another.]* Perhaps this is Two and that is Three.

HILARY.

[A letter in each hand.] Is it of much consequence? *[He reads both, hurriedly, and returns them to her.]* Thank you.

NINA.

[Giving him the fourth letter.] The last "Thursday ——"

HILARY.

[Glancing at her.] It was on a Thursday—she ——

NINA.

While he was on a visit here!

HILARY.

[With a nod.] This might have been written—in the morning ——

NINA

It took place in the afternoon, didn't it?

HILARY.

[Reading.] Yes.

NINA.

This is about Derek. [*Looking over his shoulder.*] Next page. [*He turns the page and again she points to a particular passage.*] "As to the child ——" It begins there.

HILARY.

"As to the child, how often have I told you I don't expect you to join me without *him*?"

NINA.

[*Reading with him.*] "You remember our last talk in town——?"

HILARY.

"—talk in town? In God's name, what gives you the notion that I could bear, any more than you could, to leave our boy . . . to leave our boy . . . in Jesson's keeping?"

NINA.

Go on.

[*He reads to the end; then, dropping the letter upon the table, rises and paces the room. She folds the letters and tucks them away carefully into her bodice.*]

HILARY.

[*Pausing in his walk—with feeling.*] I—of course I—it goes without saying, I hope—of course I apologize to you most sincerely.

NINA.

Apologize?

HILARY.

For accusing you of being inclined to twist innocent things into guilty ones.

NINA.

[*Waving the apology away.*] Oh —

HILARY.

I—I fear your allegations are too well grounded.
[*Resuming his walk—working the story out in his brain.*]
Annabel—Maurewarde; Annabel —! Yes, yes—
Maurewarde—Derek —! [*She rises. He approaches her.*] Tell me again. The child was sitting, writing—
here—when you opened the bag?

NINA.

Yes.

HILARY.

Then he didn't see you extract the letters? Is that so?

NINA.

No, he didn't see me.

HILARY.

He is ignorant that they were in the bag?

NINA.

Absolutely. It was empty, for all he knew.

HILARY.

You are sure?

NINA.

Positive.

HILARY.

Where is the bag?

NINA.

He has taken it to his fa—to Filmer.

HILARY.

When Filmer opens it ——?

NINA.

He'll find nothing.

HILARY.

[*With a sigh of relief.*] Ah! [*Softening.*] Oh, my dear Mrs. Filmer, what a mercy—a mercy we can never be sufficiently grateful for ——!

NINA.

Mercy?

HILARY.

If these terrible letters *had* to come to light—what a mercy it is that they should have fallen into our hands.

NINA.

[*Steadily.*] Into *my* hands.

HILARY.

[*Accepting the correction.*] Into *your* —— [*Blankly, struck by her tone.*] Why, you wouldn't—you haven't the smallest intention of ——? [*Checking himself.*] I—I beg your pardon.

NINA.

I wouldn't—I haven't the smallest intention ——? Won't you finish?

HILARY.

Please, please! You must forgive me.

NINA.

I wouldn't *use* them, was on the tip of your tongue, wasn't it?

HILARY.

Ah, Mrs. Filmer! At a moment like this—the shock, the horror of it all!—a man may be excused if his thoughts run a little wild.

NINA.

[*Calmly.*] Oh, your thoughts are sane enough, apparently. You ask me whether I intend to make use of the letters. The question slipped out, but I'll answer it. Yes, I do intend to use them.

HILARY.

You—you don't!

NINA.

I do, certainly.

HILARY.

You couldn't be so cruel!

NINA.

Cruel!

HILARY.

So—damnably vindictive! [*Furiously.*] You sha'n't use them.

NINA.

Mr. Jesson!

HILARY.

You shall not!

NINA.

What's to prevent me—or who? Or who? [*Gripping the letters through her bodice.*] Even if you snatched them away from me—tore them away from me—I *know*;

I know. But I don't think you'd forget yourself to that extent.

[He turns from her and seats himself in the chair behind the settee on the left.]

HILARY.

[After a silence, regaining his composure.] How are you going to set about it?

NINA.

[Ruffled.] Ha! That's more courteous. *[Sitting upon the seat before the escritoire.]* While you are all out of the house—opening the park!—I shall shut myself up in my bedroom and copy the letters.

HILARY.

You will allow them to open the park with clear consciences, then?

NINA.

Oh, yes, they shall enjoy their solemn parade. The mockery of it! *[With a curl of the lip.]* But they wouldn't forego that, in any event.

HILARY.

Afterward ——?

NINA.

How curious you are!

HILARY.

No—merely interested.

NINA.

Afterward —— *[Puckering her brows.]* I shall put the copy into an envelope, with a note explaining how the originals came into my possession ——

HILARY.

And ——?

NINA.

And see that Geraldine receives it directly she returns.

HILARY.

[*Between his teeth.*] And hit my brother a blow from which he will never recover; and bastardize the boy; and drag ——

NINA.

[*Rising.*] Oh, no, no; you're a great deal too quick. I'm not hurting Filmor, much as he has hurt me—or the boy. Except for Maurewarde, the secret will be yours and mine—and the Ridgeleys'. Trust them to keep it. [*Walking to the fireplace.*] It's the Ridgeleys I'm aiming my blow at. [*Clenching her fists.*] The Ridgeleys! The Ridgeleys!

HILARY.

Geraldine will tell her people, you think?

NINA.

[*At the settee on the left, with relish.*] I should say she will be forced to, sooner or later.

HILARY.

Forced?

NINA.

To account for the alteration in her attitude toward me; to convince them of the necessity for a total change of attitude on their part. [*Sitting, triumphantly.*] Ah!

HILARY.

I understand. Henceforth, down on their marrow-bones, eh—the whole Ridgeley family?

NINA.

[*Suddenly kneeling upon the settee, her elbows upon the back of it, her face on a level with his.*] As I have been to them ever since Geraldine was sent for ; ever since Geraldine took up the reins again, here and in London. She shall crawl to me—Geraldine shall—as I've crawled to her ; and you're right—she shall make them all crawl. Hilary—Mr. Jesson—often and often I've cried myself to sleep, after being tormented by Geraldine almost beyond endurance ; cried half through the night. Now it's her turn, if she has a tear in her. *She shall be meek and groveling now, to me—consulting my wishes, my tastes, in everything ; taking orders from me and carrying them out like a paid servant. I sha'n't be terrified any longer at her frown and her thin lips, but at a look from me she shall catch her breath—as I've done—and flush up, and lower those steely gray eyes of hers. And she won't be able to free herself from me. I've got her! I've got her, and she sha'n't leave me till I choose to dismiss her.* [*Striking the back of the settee.*] Oh, she has tortured me—tortured me—she and her tribe ; and from to-day —— ! You watch ! You watch !

[*She sinks down upon the settee, weeping with anger. He rises and walks away to the right.*]

HILARY.

Yes, undoubtedly you are upper dog, my dear Mrs. Filmer. Whether or not the rest of the Ridgeleys are made to participate in the secret ; whether or not it has ultimately to be revealed to my brother ; from the moment Miss Geraldine receives your agreeable missive, you become upper dog unquestionably.

NINA.

[*Drying her eyes.*] Ah, ha, upper dog !

HILARY.

On reflection, there is only one consideration that I can suggest that should cause you to hesitate.

NINA.

[*Raising her head.*] One —— ?

HILARY.

Human nature being what it is, I admit you can scarcely be expected to commiserate our friends, the Ridgeleys, very deeply.

NINA.

Scarcely.

HILARY.

Nor, alas—if it comes to it—my brother. But there *is* a solitary figure in the tragical-comical picture of Filmer's earlier married life which seems to me to stand out from its surroundings, and to cry aloud to you to throw those letters into the fire and to forget their contents.

NINA.

A solitary figure? [*Foreseeing his answer.*] Who—whose ?

HILARY.

Annabel's.

NINA.

[*Rising and confronting him—in a hard voice.*] Annabel's!

HILARY.

[*Continuing, after a brief silence—quietly.*] She has been dealt with, you know.

NINA.

Dealt with ?

HILARY.

She paid. Her account is balanced. Two thick black lines are scored under it. The book's closed.

NINA.

Paid! [*Advancing.*] How—paid? In what way has she paid? Aren't you all about to open this miserable park in commemoration of her?

HILARY.

We are. And I shall perform my share of the function, in spite of those letters, without a scruple.

NINA.

[*Satirically.*] You—you are very chivalrous, Mr. Jes-son.

HILARY.

[*With a slight bow.*] I am six-and-forty.

NINA.

But isn't it rather a mistaken chivalry which leads you to gloss over this woman's wickedness?

HILARY.

I don't gloss it over.

NINA.

To put it aside.

HILARY.

Nor do I put it aside. I couldn't if I would; it will haunt me till my dying day. It is so monstrously grotesque, so odious—and so little flattering to the discernment. And yet I wouldn't add to the punishment she underwent by inflicting a single scratch upon the image—the false image—those who loved her, and exalted her, have set up.

NINA.

Punishment! [*Seating herself in the chair behind the settee on the left.*] All this talk, talk, talk of punishment, and payment! [*Unrelentingly.*] It's true, her end was sudden—awfully sudden —

HILARY.

No, no; that wasn't her punishment. A pair of runaway horses, an overturned carriage, a stone-heap by the roadside, death in a flash! That wasn't her punishment; that was her release. [*At NINA's side.*] Her punishment! Why, read that scoundrel's letters again. "The past six or seven years—" he says, "—the past six or seven years have been hell upon earth." To *him*, hell upon earth. Were they pleasanter to *her*? What must they have been to *her*? He goes on to remind her—doesn't he?—that both he and she were nearly broken by their sufferings. Piece it together; trace it from the start. A young woman—carefully trained, according to the narrow views of her parents—content, in her ignorance, with finding herself mistress of the ice-house my poor brother calls his home. Then—Maurewarde! Handsome, brave—heaven save the mark!—ardent, *alive*! Then, the first gleam of romance—and the drifting—and the surrender—and the awakening—and the agony of remorse—and the commencement, in cold blood, of the regular, dreary game of deception. Then, the child—the blessing turned to a curse. What a motherhood! Conceive it! The bitter tears shed silently upon the pillow, the inward writhings, the dumb cries for support; and, after a time, the resuming of her customary duties and of her place, opposite her husband, at his table. And once more, and to the finish, the mask chafing the face and the ceaseless guard over every word, and look, and gesture. Punishment —!

NINA.

You imagine this—invent it. Of course, *he*—Maure-

warde—was full of his sufferings ; he was persuading her to elope.

HILARY.

While she, poor wretch, was shunning him, trying to shut her ears to him.

NINA.

Shut her ears to him ! She didn't even destroy his love-letters. Why ? Because she was studying them, pondering them ; because she was weighing her desire to bolt against the advantages of continued " respectability." [*Starting up.*] Phuh ! you are wasting your sympathies, Mr. Jesson.

[She passes him, going toward the right. He detains her by laying a hand upon her arm.]

HILARY.

Yes, but granting that she was on the point of flying with Maurewarde ; granting it—what then ?

NINA.

[Facing him.] What then !

HILARY.

Granting that the strain had become unbearable, and that exposure and dishonor would have been a welcome relief—she wasn't allowed to take that last desperate step, remember.

NINA.

Not allowed —— ?

HILARY.

No ; she was stopped.

NINA.

Stopped ? By whom ?

HILARY.

By whom ?

NINA.

Who stopped her ?

HILARY.

[*After a pause.*] Your father was a parson, wasn't he, Mrs. Filmer ?

NINA.

Well ?

HILARY.

He couldn't have been one of the grim, eternal fire-and-brimstone sort. From what I gather, he was too soft-hearted, too indulgent to his daughter, for that.

NINA.

[*Coldly.*] I don't —

HILARY.

Did you never learn from him, in his church or in your daily intercourse—you and he were inseparable, weren't you?—did he never encourage you in any of those simple beliefs that bring peace and comfort to many people ?

NINA.

Beliefs ?

HILARY.

The belief, for instance, in the doctrine of Divine interposition in the ordinary affairs of life.

NINA.

[*Leaving him and leaning against the oblong table.*] Oh, he may have done.

HILARY.

[*Following her and standing before her.*] Well, here was this woman, we will suppose, entertaining the idea of eloping with her companion in sin and branding her innocent child with illegitimacy. On the morning of the very day on which she meets her death—on that fatal Thursday—she receives a letter from Maurewarde—we've read it—a letter which may have turned the scale and broken down her resolution never to betray the secret of the boy's birth. It's, at least, possible that it was so. And she goes out for her afternoon drive—alone; to familiarize her thoughts, perhaps, with her future. What happens? She's saved; and the boy's saved. And the trees in this bare park will shoot up; and Derek, when he's a grown man, will walk under 'em, and picture fondly and reverently the mother who was taken from him when he was a little chap. Come, Mrs. Filmer! Let us believe, if we can—if it makes us better, and gentler, and more merciful!—let us believe that in all this there was the hand of God!

NINA.

[*Harshly.*] Very well; let us believe it. [*Looking him in the face defiantly and measuring her words.*] Only we must believe equally that it's the hand of God that has brought these letters from their hiding-place and has delivered them to me.

HILARY.

Yes, believe that also. And ask yourself—ask yourself on your knees—whether they have been given you to use in the way you propose to use them. Nina—

[*She moves away from him again and sits before the escritoire, resting her elbows upon it and supporting her chin with her fist. He takes a chair and seats himself close to her, so that she can hardly avoid his gaze.*

HILARY.

Nina, my dear friend, don't think that, because I preach to you, I pose as being a man who has nothing in his life to look back upon of which he is ashamed. Far from it, my dear, I confess to you humbly. But I have, in my knocking about the globe, seen a good deal of men and women ; and I declare to you that the happy people I've come across have never been the people who, possessing power, have employed it malevolently or uncharitably. I know your position is a difficult one ; a hard one, in many respects ; and that the temptation which assails you this morning is a temptation few could resist. Still—*do* resist it. Things are not so bad with you as to be beyond mending ; on the contrary, I think it likely that, if you'll be patient, matters will eventually adjust themselves between you and Filmer. But I tell you, Nina, that at this moment you are in danger of putting the chances of happiness away from you irretrievably. More ! I promise you that you can attain real happiness ; attain the only solid happiness in this world ; to-day, by the act of renunciation I urge upon you. [*She stirs slightly. He draws nearer.*] Nina, there are some people walking the earth who are wearing a halo. It's invisible to you and me ; *we* can't see it ; but it's there, round their brows, none the less ; and the glow of it lights the dark walls of their lives, and sustains them through pain, and oppression, and tribulation. They are the people who have made sacrifices ; who've been tempted and have conquered ; who have been offered a sword, or a sceptre, or a bludgeon, and who have shaken their heads and passed on. They are the people who have *renounced*. Nina, be among those who wear the halo. Burn Maurewarde's letters, my dear—[*glancing at the cold grate*] or give them to me—and forget you've ever read them.

[*She rises and leaves the escritoire. He rises with her. Her fingers stray to her breast and, at last, she produces the letters and hands them to him.*]

NINA.

[*Simply.*] I'll forget them.

[*They turn their heads toward the window, listening.*]

NINA.

[*In a low voice.*] The carriages?

HILARY.

Yes.

NINA.

[*Quickly.*] Ask Filmer to wait a few minutes for me.

HILARY.

Wait — ?

NINA.

[*Her eyes meeting his.*] I'll come to the park.

[*She goes out, swiftly but noiselessly, at the door on the left. At the same moment, the other door is opened by FILMER who enters. He is followed by LADY RIDGELEY and SIR DANIEL and, at intervals, by GERALDINE, PRYCE, and DILNOTT—the latter wearing his chain of office. MAUREWARDE, Mlle. THOMÉ, and DEREK are also seen but remain in the outer hall.*]

FILMER.

Oh, Hilary—[*referring to some memoranda*] let me see. Number Two. The second carriage, if you please. You take the seat —

[*HARDING appears in the outer hall, coming from the right. The men-servants busy themselves with hats, overcoats, and rugs.*]

HARDING.

[*In the doorway.*] The carriages are here, sir.

HILARY.

[*Who has slipped the letters into his pocket—loudly, looking at his watch.*] They must be kept waiting ; Nina is changing her gown.

FILMER.

Changing ——? You—you don't mean ——?

HILARY.

Yes, she is coming with us.

GERALDINE.

Nina is!

FILMER.

My dear Hilary!

LADY RIDGELEY.

Coming with us!

SIR DANIEL.

To the park!

PRYCE.

[*With a shrug.*] Really, one never knows ——

FILMER.

[*To Hilary.*] Thank you—thank you ——

HILARY.

[*Waving his arms above his head.*] Oh, I told you—I told you she's quite reasonable.

[*He hurries out, to hide his emotion, passing through the outer hall and disappearing on the left. Those near the door fall back to make way for him, and everybody stares after him in astonishment.*]

END OF THE THIRD ACT

THE FOURTH ACT

The scene is the same. The chair displaced in the previous act has been put back into its original position, and the things upon the oblong table are again arranged neatly.

The fire is now burning. The double-door is open.

[NOTE.—Everybody but NINA is dressed as in Act III.]

[HILARY, coming from the left, appears in the outer hall and looks into the room. Seeing that the room is empty, he motions to somebody who is out of sight. After a pause, MAUREWARDE, smoking a cigar, passes HILARY and enters. HILARY closes the door quietly and advances to MAUREWARDE.]

MAUREWARDE.

What's wrong, Hilary?

HILARY.

You received a telegram just now, while we were at lunch.

MAUREWARDE.

[Searching his pockets.] Yes.

HILARY.

It puzzles you.

MAUREWARDE.

Couldn't make head or tail of it. [Producing a telegram.] It's from this town. Do you know anything about it?

HILARY.

I sent it.

MAUREWARDE,

You?

HILARY.

On our way back from the park.

MAUREWARDE.

[*Reading the telegram.*] "Return it at once important." [To HILARY.] Why do you send this to me?

HILARY.

To provide you with a decent excuse for clearing out.

MAUREWARDE.

Clearing out?

HILARY.

Forever, so far as this household is concerned. [*Sternly.*] Go, man; and don't show your face here again—here or in my brother's house in London. Vanish; pass out of his life.

[*There are some railway guides in a rack on the oblong table. HILARY selects one of them and opens it. MAUREWARDE deliberately throws his cigar into the grate.*]

MAUREWARDE.

[*Steadily.*] Something has been found?

HILARY.

[*Turning the leaves of the railway guide.*] Yes.

MAUREWARDE.

What?

HILARY.

Letters.

MAUREWARDE.

Whose letters?

HILARY.

Yours—to Annabel. There's a train at two-forty.

MAUREWARDE.

Who found them?

HILARY.

Nina—Mrs. Filmer; this morning. Reaches St. Pancras five fifty-two.

MAUREWARDE.

Where were they?

HILARY.

[*Replacing the railway guide.*] Concealed in a cupboard in the boudoir. [*Looking at his watch.*] You've ample time to change. Your servant can pack and follow you later.

MAUREWARDE.

The letters? Are they—deadly?

HILARY.

Deadly.

MAUREWARDE.

Will Mrs. Filmer keep quiet, or split?

HILARY.

She'll keep quiet, [*significantly*] unless ——

MAUREWARDE.

She's told *you*.

HILARY.

She could scarcely do *this* job herself.

MAUREWARDE.

That's true. She must be a good sort, Jesson—considering the way they treat her.

HILARY.

She *is* a good sort.

MAUREWARDE.

I asked whether she'd split because, if she did, and your brother wished to have a shot at me, I—I'd give him every chance.

HILARY.

I'm afraid we can't afford you that glory.

MAUREWARDE.

[*Thoughtfully.*] Perhaps it's best as it is—for the sake of—others. [*Moving a step or two toward the door on the left and then halting.*] What do you suggest I should do? Live abroad?

HILARY.

Not a bad plan.

MAUREWARDE.

Won't everybody—wonder?

HILARY.

[*With a shrug.*] Your reputation protects you. Sulks Maurewarde!

MAUREWARDE.

[*Bitterly.*] Sulks Maurewarde! Yes, that comes in conveniently, doesn't it? [*He opens the door on the left and is going. Suddenly he shuts the door and returns to* HILARY.] Jesson —!

HILARY.

Well?

MAUREWARDE.

[*Passionately.*] She belonged to me. We met too late; that was the misfortune. But from the moment we did meet, we saw what was in store for us, as plainly as if it had been written on the walls. Nobody knew her but I. She was no more like her own dull, canting set than I'm like your fish of a brother. *He* knew her least of all—looked upon her as a beautiful machine. She *was* beautiful; but she was a woman—a woman, Jesson. From childhood onward, before her marriage and after, she wore a disguise. And the only one—the only one—ever to see through her disguise; to see how her heart was beating under it; was myself—was myself——!

HILARY.

[*Turning his head toward the outer hall and listening.*]
Sssh!

[*MAUREWARDE leaves HILARY as DEREK opens the double-door and peeps in.*]

DEREK.

[*To HILARY, who is standing between the door and MAUREWARDE.*] Excuse me. Is Maurry there?

[*HILARY draws back, revealing MAUREWARDE, and DEREK enters. The door is left open.*]

DEREK.

[*To MAUREWARDE, severely.*] Did you get my letter this morning?

MAUREWARDE.

Yes, I got it.

DEREK.

I suppose you thought I wouldn't speak to you again for weeks and weeks, didn't you?

MAUREWARDE.

No, I'd an idea we'd make it up after lunch.

DEREK.

Indeed! Oh, it's not as easy as that. Still, what are you doing this afternoon?

MAUREWARDE.

I—I —

HILARY.

[*On the right.*] Major Maurewarde has to go back to town, Derek.

DEREK.

Go back!

HILARY.

By the next train.

DEREK.

[*Seizing MAUREWARDE's hand.*] Maurry! [MAUREWARDE sits in the chair behind the settee on the left and draws the boy to him.] Oh, don't go back! Not to-day! Go to-morrow. Maurry —

[MAUREWARDE, looking over DEREK's head, meets HILARY's gaze, and reads in it HILARY's knowledge of the whole truth.]

DEREK.

Maurry, I'll tell you something. I came after you expressly to forgive you. I meant to, all along. I'm not cruel, really. [*His arm round MAUREWARDE's neck.*] Stay till to-morrow. I forgive you, Maurry; I forgive you.

[FILMER, SIR DANIEL, PRYCE, and HARDING appear in the outer hall, coming from the right. They are wearing garden hats and PRYCE is smoking a cigar. Talking, they lay their hats upon a table in the hall.]

FILMER.

[*To SIR DANIEL.*] Oh, Dilnott has many excellent qualities.

SIR DANIEL.

I may have judged him hastily.

PRYCE.

His speech was as feeble as his triumphal arch.

[*MAUREWARDE rises, and DEREK goes to the door and calls softly to FILMER.*]

DEREK.

Father—father, dear ——

FILMER.

[*Coming to DEREK.*] Ah, my boy.

DEREK.

[*Leading him toward MAUREWARDE.*] Father, persuade Maury to stay.

FILMER.

To stay?

MAUREWARDE.

[*To FILMER.*] That telegram they gave me at lunch ——

FILMER.

No bad news?

MAUREWARDE.

[*Avoiding FILMER's eye.*] No, no ; no. But I must be in town this evening—[*taking out his watch*] and if I can catch the—the —— !

HILARY.

[*Looking out of the window.*] The two-forty ——

FILMER.

[Also consulting his watch—to MAUREWARDE, regretfully.] My dear fellow——!

[SIR DANIEL and PRYCE have followed FILMER into the room and wandered to the fire. HARDING now enters.]

FILMER.

[To HARDING.] Harding, Major Maurewarde is returning to town. A dog-cart at the door in seven or eight minutes.

[HARDING withdraws, passing through the outer hall and going toward the left.]

FILMER.

[To MAUREWARDE.] When are we to see you again?

MAUREWARDE.

It—it's uncertain.

FILMER.

Why not run down again on Saturday?

MAUREWARDE.

I—I'll let you know.

[He goes out at door on the left.]

FILMER.

[Joining PRYCE and SIR DANIEL.] An odd, good creature——

HILARY.

[Coming to DEREK, who is standing by the oblong table trying to keep back his tears—tenderly.] Derek——

DEREK.

W—w—what?

HILARY.

[*Pointing to the door on the left.*] You can have five minutes more of him. Make the most of it.

DEREK.

[*In a whisper.*] Oh, yes. Thank you, uncle.

[*As DEREK disappears, GERALDINE's voice is heard.*]

GERALDINE.

[*In the outer hall—authoritatively.*] Nina, we are waiting for you. Nina——

[*With a stamp of the foot, HILARY seats himself at the escritoire and savagely gnaws a pen. LADY RIDGELEY and GERALDINE enter from the outer hall, coming from the left. NINA, meek and acquiescent, follows them. She is in "half-mourning."*]

LADY RIDGELEY.

[*To FILMER.*] So we are losing Major Maurewarde, Filmer?

FILMER.

[*Advancing.*] He's had a telegram, calling him back to town.

GERALDINE.

[*Glancing round the room.*] Has Dr. Dillnott gone?

FILMER.

Yes. An urgent case over at Dunsleigh.

LADY RIDGELEY.

[*Sitting, on the left of the oblong table, with a sigh.*] Some poor patient he is neglecting, I suppose.

GERALDINE.

[*Sitting, at the further end of the table.*] Ah, it's pleasant to be by ourselves.

LADY RIDGELEY.

We can talk so much more freely. [*To NINA, who is moving to the settee on the right.*] Child, how your dress rustles!

NINA.

[*Humbly, sitting upon the settee.*] Does it? I'm sorry.

LADY RIDGELEY.

Mourning and a crackling silk lining seem to me to be hardly in keeping.

GERALDINE.

You ought to have it removed, Nina.

NINA.

It shall be.

LADY RIDGELEY.

[*Looking about her.*] And now we can say, frankly and openly—what an impressive ceremony!

SIR DANIEL.

Impressive! My very word—eh, Pryce?

PRYCE.

Yes, father.

FILMER.

[*Who has seated himself in the chair behind the settee on the left.*] Yes, I think it passed off exceedingly well. [*To HILARY.*] What's your opinion, Hilary?

HILARY.

[*Turning to them.*] Certainly, a great success.

SIR DANIEL.

H'm. Success is a term I should apply to proceedings of a more avowedly entertaining character. [*Emphatically.*] No, impressive; profoundly impressive.

PRYCE.

Who was that dirty-looking ruffian ——?

GERALDINE.

[*Reprovingly.*] Pryce, Pryce!

LADY RIDGELEY.

[*Reprovingly.*] Pryce, Pryce!

PRYCE.

The dirty-looking ruffian who shouted out "band-stand!"?

FILMER.

Haddington, the proprietor of the motor garage, I hear from Mr. Harding.

LADY RIDGELEY.

What a criminal face it was!

GERALDINE.

Repulsive.

SIR DANIEL.

I fear the motor industry attracts a good deal of the blackguardly element.

HILARY.

[*Quietly.*] And yet this monster of iniquity—Hadding-

ton—may be a dutiful husband, and perhaps is to be seen o' nights dandling his babes upon his knee.

[*The RIDGELEYS frown at HILARY.*

FILMER.

Hilary, Hilary, do be serious sometimes.

LADY RIDGELEY.

The one discordant note—[*glancing at HILARY*—I speak of the ladies of our party—was Miss Tomy.

GERALDINE.

I agree, mother. She *was* over-gowned, and over-hatted.

LADY RIDGELEY.

For a person of her position, atrociously.

SIR DANIEL.

Showy. Yes, showy.

PRYCE.

If you will engage a foreigner —

FILMER.

[*Puzzled.*] And she was almost entirely in black. Curious.

HILARY.

She has been three years in England, too, I gather.

GERALDINE.

Longer, if she's to be believed.

HILARY.

And remains—smart.

SIR DANIEL.

Showy.

HILARY.

Élégante. What an extraordinary lack of imitative capacity the woman must have !

FILMER.

[*Irritably.*] Hilary, Hilary !

LADY RIDGELEY.

However, we can forgive, and forget, Miss Tomy in the feeling of satisfaction—[*turning to NINA*] the feeling of satisfaction——

GERALDINE.

[*To NINA.*] Nina——

NINA.

[*Who is lost in thought, rousing herself.*] Yes ?

LADY RIDGELEY.

Don't sit out there.

[*NINA rises and comes forward.*]

LADY RIDGELEY.

[*Addressing her.*] I was saying that we can forget Miss Tomy's vulgarity in the intense gratification you have just given me and Geraldine—a gratification which will be shared by the rest of my family. [*To FILMER.*] Filmer, after you left the luncheon-table, your wife took the opportunity of expressing her deep regret for her recent behavior. I won't ask her to repeat her assurances——

[*FILMER and HILARY rise simultaneously, the latter with an ominous light in his eyes.*]

FILMER.

No, no ; quite, quite unnecessary. [*To NINA, kindly.*] My dear Nina. [*She advances to him and he lays his hands upon her shoulders.*] My dear Nina, you have

made me extremely happy. [*Kissing her on the forehead.*] So that's all over, eh? [*Patting her shoulders.*] That's all over.

LADY RIDGELEY.

[*Rising.*] Nina — [*NINA turns to her.*] I think the time has come when I may call you by your Christian name—[*kissing her in a patronising manner*] Nina—[*going to SIR DANIEL and PRYCE*] Pryce—Dan —
[*PRYCE and SIR DANIEL advance to NINA, and LADY RIDGELEY joins FILMER at the fireplace.*]

PRYCE.

[*To NINA.*] I—er—of course, I'm not actually a brother-in-law, but I hope that in future you'll—er—consider me one.

[*He kisses her ear and, taking a book from the oblong table, sits upon the settee facing the window.*]

SIR DANIEL.

[*To NINA, with heavy playfulness.*] Ha-ha-ha! You see, we are not such terrible people, after all. [*Kissing the top of her head.*] Not such terrible—people—hey!

[*He resigns her to GERALDINE, who now approaches, and seats himself at the further end of the oblong table.*]

GERALDINE.

[*To NINA.*] There! What did I promise you!

[*GERALDINE kisses her, and, as HILARY comes to NINA, joins FILMER and LADY RIDGELEY.*]

HILARY.

[*To NINA.*] And I—your brother —?

[*They look at each other for a while in silence. Then she holds up her face to him, and he kisses her reverentially upon the cheek. At the same moment*]

MLLE. THOMÉ *appears in the outer hall, coming from the left.* MLLE. THOMÉ *is in a state of great indignation.*

MLLE. THOMÉ.

[*Seeing NINA and entering.*] Madame! Oh, madame——!

NINA.

[*Turning to her.*] Mademoiselle?

MLLE. THOMÉ.

[*Displaying a rent in her skirt.*] Ah, ze dogs!

NINA.

[*On the left of the oblong table.*] The dogs?

MLLE. THOMÉ.

Ze puppies! Zey are in ze 'ouse. Look 'ere! Zey tear me! *Oh, je suis en lambeaux!*

NINA.

The puppies!

MLLE. THOMÉ.

Oui, oui, oui, ces petites betes féroces.

GERALDINE.

[*Advancing, followed by FILMER.*] In the house!

FILMER.

Indoors? My dear Geraldine!

MLLE. THOMÉ.

[*To GERALDINE.*] Ven you send me away from ze dining room, so zat you talk to Madame Jesson, I go through ze conservatory, and—*malheureusement!*—I leave ze door open. And ven I come back, ze puppies are all over

ze place, and zey r-r-rush at me to play. *Voyez dans quel état ils m'ont mise !*

FILMER.

They were running loose in the garden, then?

GERALDINE.

Nobody in charge of them !

NINA.

[*In a faint voice.*] Baxter couldn't have fastened the kennel-gate after I fed them. [*With a movement.*] Please let me —

FILMER.

[*Stiffly.*] No, no. I'll inquire into this.

[*He passes through the outer hall and disappears on the left. NINA sits, with a woeful face, in the chair on the left of the oblong table.*]

LADY RIDGELEY.

[*Coming forward.*] Your beautiful dress, Miss Tomy !

GERALDINE.

Her pretty skirt !

HILARY.

[*Moving to the fireplace—to himself, between his teeth.*] Gurrh !

[*LADY RIDGELEY and GERALDINE examine the damaged skirt, MME. THOMÉ uttering plaintive cries.*]

LADY RIDGELEY.

Is it ruined ?

GERALDINE.

A new length will have to be inserted.

LADY RIDGELEY.

And she is wearing it for the first time!

[MLLE. THOMÉ goes to the *escritoire*, where there is a *pin-cushion*, and proceeds to pin the tear together.]

GERALDINE.

If this were only exceptional. But one is never safe from these annoyances at the Towers nowadays.

LADY RIDGELEY.

[Assisting MLLE. THOMÉ in the pinning of the skirt.]
What has happened this afternoon —

GERALDINE.

May happen to-morrow.

PRYCE.

[Not raising his eyes from his book.] Dogs are the greatest nuisance on earth, in town or country.

SIR DANIEL.

A cat, yes. I like to watch a cat occasionally.

GERALDINE.

[To NINA.] Oh, my dear, dear Nina, why won't you try to fall into line with us on this ever-recurring subject? Filmer doesn't care for animals; I—but I put myself entirely out of the question. [Her hand on NINA's shoulder.] And you are doing so well now in other respects, so admirably —

MLLE. THOMÉ.

[Discovering further injury.] Ah, malheur! Encore une autre déchirure!

LADY RIDGELEY.

Another!

GERALDINE.

[*Glancing at Mlle. Thomé.*] Poor Mademoiselle!

NINA.

Geraldine —

GERALDINE.

[*To Nina.*] Yes?

NINA.

[*Slowly.*] I wonder whether Mellish would take the puppies off my hands?

GERALDINE.

Both litters?

NINA.

[*Inclining her head.*] The Aberdeens and the Clumbers; I bought both from him.

GERALDINE.

I dare say he would, at a loss to ourselves. All such men are rogues.

SIR DANIEL.

Dog-dealers? Thieves, without exception.

PRYCE.

Scoundrels.

NINA.

[*To Geraldine.*] Will you—will you write to him for me?

GERALDINE.

[*Sharply.*] You wish me to?

NINA.

Yes. [*Rising—firmly.*] I give them up.

GERALDINE.

That's right ; and so stop this wearisome dissension.

NINA.

The old kennels were empty when I came here.
[*Drawing a deep breath.*] They'll be empty, and quiet,
once more.

GERALDINE.

[*Embracing her formally.*] And you will be far happier
for the trifling sacrifice you are making.

[*NINA frees herself from GERALDINE, passes her,
and then turns to her quickly.*]

NINA.

[*To GERALDINE.*] Write—soon.

GERALDINE.

Directly.

[*NINA comes face to face with HILARY, who has
been watching the proceedings from under his
brows with a set jaw, and again they stand look-
ing at each other silently and eloquently.*]

GERALDINE.

[*Going to LADY RIDGELEY.*] Mother, darling, Nina
consents to these dreadful dogs being packed off.

[*FILMER appears in the outer hall, coming from the
left. He is accompanied by MAUREWARDE—
dressed for his journey—and by DEREK, who is
holding MAUREWARDE'S hand. HARDING fol-
lows, and the servants, one carrying a traveling-
bag, the other MAUREWARDE'S hat and gloves,
also are seen.*]

FILMER.

[*In the doorway.*] Major Maurewarde is going.

[*SIR DANIEL and PRYCE rise.*]

Mlle. Thomé.

Going! *Ah, quel dommage!*

[MAUREWARDE enters, DEREK still keeping close to him, and comes to NINA. In the outer hall there is much moving to and fro by HARDING and the servants.]

MAUREWARDE.

[To NINA.] Good-bye. [She gives him her hand, a little constrainedly.] Thank you. [To HILARY.] Good-bye.

HILARY.

[His hands behind him, but betraying nothing by his tone.] Good-bye.

MAUREWARDE.

[Shaking hands with LADY RIDGELEY, GERALDINE and Mlle. Thomé.] Good-bye. Good-bye. Good-bye.

LADY RIDGELEY.

A pleasant journey.

GERALDINE.

What a pity you have to leave us!

Mlle. Thomé.

Bon voyage, Major Maurewarde.

MAUREWARDE.

[Shaking hands with SIR DANIEL and PRYCE.] Good-bye.

[He catches up DEREK, hugging him and kissing him fiercely.]

DEREK.

Oh, Maurry, you are squeezing me to death!

[He puts the boy down and goes out, turning to the right. FILMER, SIR DANIEL, PRYCE, and

Mlle. Thomé with DEREK, follow—as if to see the last of the departing guest—while LADY RIDGELEY and GERALDINE stand in the doorway.

NINA.

[To HILARY, in a whisper.] This is through you?

HILARY.

[Nodding.] Yes.

NINA.

He knows?

HILARY.

Yes. [Looking toward the outer hall.] That chapter draws to an end.

[The men are heard calling final farewells to MAUREWARDE. As the chorus of voices ceases, DEREK'S voice is heard alone.

DEREK.

[In the distance.] Good-bye, Maurry.

HILARY.

C'est fini.

[NINA sits, in the chair on the left, with her head bowed. FILMER, SIR DANIEL, PRYCE, DEREK, Mlle. Thomé, HARDING, and the servants, reappear in the outer hall. Mlle. Thomé, going toward the left, leads DEREK away, and the servants depart in the same direction.

FILMER.

[In the outer hall, to HARDING.] Mr. Harding, give me a few moments.

[FILMER and HARDING disappear. GERALDINE seats herself at the *escritoire* and writes a letter. PRYCE and SIR DANIEL reënter, the former returning to his book.

SIR DANIEL.

[*To LADY RIDGELEY, who is on the point of speaking to NINA.*] Shall we make the most of the sun, Harriet?

LADY RIDGELEY.

I was about to propose it. [*To NINA.*] Nina —

NINA.

[*Rising, promptly and obediently.*] Yes, Lady Ridgeley?

LADY RIDGELEY.

Sir Daniel and I will take you round the grounds.

SIR DANIEL.

Yes, we will take her round the grounds.

LADY RIDGELEY.

[*To GERALDINE.*] Geraldine —?

GERALDINE.

I'll come after you, mother. I'm writing to the dog-man.

LADY RIDGELEY.

Pryce —?

PRYCE.

In a minute.

[*LADY RIDGELEY and NINA pass through the outer hall, going to the left. SIR DANIEL picks up his hat and follows them. HILARY walks over to the escritoire and stands beside GERALDINE, looking down upon her.*]

HILARY.

A letter to the dog-man, eh, Miss Geraldine?

GERALDINE.

[*Writing.*] To Mellish—yes.

HILARY.

[*Softly.*] Hurrah! Brava! *Chiquito!* So you've succeeded in banishing these ill-mannered puppies at last.

GERALDINE.

I trust so.

HILARY.

I make the request with the greatest deference—but may I be allowed to present Nina with half-a-dozen white mice? Ah, no, I'm forgetting—they have such enormous families, don't they?

GERALDINE.

Really I am quite ignorant of their habits.

HILARY.

What about a lonely, wistful guinea-pig? Or a bullfinch? Not an educated bullfinch, but a bird that could be relied upon never to pipe.

GERALDINE.

[*Slightly raising her voice.*] Pryce —

PRYCE.

Yes?

GERALDINE.

Do you mind being a target for Mr. Jesson's satire while I write my note?

[PRYCE *rises lazily and advances.*]

HILARY.

Oh, are you there, Ridgeley?

PRYCE.

Yes, I'm here. [*Collecting his ideas.*] Er—Jesson—

HILARY.

[*Leaving the escritoire.*] Hallo?

PRYCE.

As a matter of fact, I've been looking for an opportunity of a quiet chat with you. Would you—er—would you object to a little candor, a little plain-speaking, on my part?

HILARY.

[*Leaning against the small table on the left.*] My dear friend! Object! Delightful!

PRYCE.

[*On the right, clearing his throat.*] Ahem! Jesson, I ask you, do you think it cricket, as the game ought to be played—do you think it cricket to devote the whole of your time here to—er—to making mischief?

GERALDINE.

[*As she writes.*] Pryce, dear!

PRYCE.

To endeavoring to create discord and—and—and bad blood? Don't be offended, Jesson; but I should have imagined there was something better to do for a man home for a short holiday, something more amusing. Of course, I'm speaking as a sort of relative—

HILARY.

[*Pleasantly.*] Not *actually* a brother-in-law; a brother-in-law by courtesy—[*with a wave of the hand*] your own, my dear Ridgeley.

PRYCE.

That's as you please. Anyhow, relative or no relative —

HILARY.

[To GERALDINE.] Will your letter be a long one, Miss Geraldine?

GERALDINE.

[Rising, her letter in her hand.] It's finished.

HILARY.

Your brother is administering a severe reprimand. I half suspect that he carries a birch under his coat-tails. [With a bow.] The schoolboy would rather not be chastised in the presence of a third person.

GERALDINE.

[To PRYCE.] You'll join us in the garden?

PRYCE.

By and by.

[HILARY seats himself in the chair behind the settee on the left as GERALDINE moves toward the outer hall. When she reaches the door, seeing that she is unobserved, she pats PRYCE'S arm approvingly. PRYCE closes the door after her and sits in the chair on the left of the oblong table.]

HILARY.

[After a silence.] Making mischief, you were saying, Ridgeley?

PRYCE.

I said it, and I stick to it.

HILARY.

Creating discord and bad blood?

PRYCE.

Doing your utmost toward it, at any rate. If you've failed, it's no fault of yours. You've done nothing but side with Filmer's wife, and oppose my sister, and run counter to my family generally, ever since my father and mother and I arrived. I admit you managed to put things a bit straight this morning; you found you'd overshot the mark, it struck me. And now you're itching to interfere in this dog business. I repeat, it isn't cricket as the game ought to be played. Stop me, if you're angry at my remarks.

HILARY.

No, no; you go on.

PRYCE.

[*Deceived by HILARY's outward calmness.*] And you're worrying Filmer, too, in a shabby, underhand way—trying to set *him* against us. That story you told last night about somebody's cook—that was mainly a slap at *us*. I detected your drift and—you'll pardon me—I thought it grossly impertinent of you. I'm clearing the air, you see.

HILARY.

[*Lightly.*] I see; I see.

PRYCE.

The only explanation of your conduct that *I* can supply is that you're a sentimental person—a person who's easily led away by a pretty face. To *you*, every pretty woman is precisely what she pretends to be—hey? A mouthful of decent teeth, and a pair of big, round eyes, and you're kissing the hem of the girl's garments! Am I right?

HILARY.

[*Gently.*] Ha, ha! I don't deny it. What a fellow you are for turning a man inside out!

PRYCE.

[*Rising.*] Oh, my intelligence mayn't be of the highest possible order; but it's a good, sound, average British intelligence for all that. [*Advancing to HILARY.*] It's an intelligence, to use the vernacular, that enables me to comprehend exactly how many blue beans make five. And, unless I'm vastly mistaken, that's a piece of arithmetic Mrs. Filmer is nearly as well acquainted with as I am.

HILARY.

[*Slowly.*] How many beans—the color appears to me to be immaterial—how many beans make five? And Mrs. Filmer, you suggest —? [*Turning in his chair and facing PRYCE.*] Ridgeley, what's at the back of your head concerning Mrs. Filmer?

PRYCE.

Oh, come now, *my* head! My dear sir, do look at the case dispassionately. Here was this young woman—Nina Graham—reared in a bare, poverty-stricken country rectory—[*in parenthesis*] some of our clergy are shamefully underpaid, Jesson; I'm surprised we get the gospel preached as satisfactorily as we do —

HILARY.

[*Beginning to show signs of restlessness.*] Yes, yes, yes—a poor country rectory —?

PRYCE.

Here was this young woman—you've heard the tale—foisted on to us, as a governess for Derek, with hardly a rag to her back or a copper in her purse. But she was fresh-looking and vivacious—I'm telling you what she *was* —

HILARY.

Yes, yes; you're telling me what she *was*.

PRYCE.

Very well. And then? Oh, *you* know, Jesson, that Filmer isn't the strong man people believe him to be. My poor dear sister Annabel *made him*, if the truth's told; it was *she* who had the head-piece. You can guess what occurred?

HILARY.

What?

PRYCE.

Just as this girl can twist you, or any simple, unsuspecting chap, round her little finger, so she attracted Filmer. He soon discovered—when it was too late, though—what a useless article he'd invested in. A dreadful shock for *us*, Jesson—my family, I mean. We're getting resigned to it now—you notice how we're unbending toward her? But it was a bitter pill to swallow—to see Annabel's home given over to an artful, intriguing little nursery-maid—she wasn't much more —

HILARY.

[*Rising and confronting PRYCE.*] Ridgeley—Ridgeley —

PRYCE.

Eh?

HILARY.

You—you cur!

PRYCE.

[*Backing away from him.*] What—what's the matter with you?

HILARY.

You cur!

PRYCE.

Who are you talking to! Who are you ——!

HILARY.

You cad, Ridgeley!

PRYCE.

[*Furiously.*] You let me go on. Why didn't you pull me up, if you didn't agree with me? A gentleman would have pulled me up——

[*The door on the left opens and FILMER appears.*]

FILMER.

Ah ——!

PRYCE.

[*To HILARY, as FILMER closes the door—under his breath.*] In confidence. [*To FILMER.*] Coming out?

FILMER.

Yes.

PRYCE.

You'll find me with the rest of 'em.

[*He goes into the outer hall, snatches up his hat, and disappears.* HILARY shuts the double-door quickly and turns to FILMER.

HILARY.

[*Advancing, quivering with passion.*] I can't bear this —can't stand it.

FILMER.

[*Astonished.*] My dear Hilary!

HILARY.

It's getting beyond me—beyond my power of endurance.

FILMER.

What is getting beyond your power of endurance?

HILARY.

[*Sitting in the chair on the left of the oblong table.*] I—I feel like an accomplice—an accomplice. I feel exactly as if I were holding the victim by the wrists while these wretches take it in turn to lash her.

FILMER.

[*Frowning.*] Wretches—victim ——?

HILARY.

I can't stand it, Filmer; I can't stand it. It's too bad; too damned cruel.

FILMER.

Really, my dear fellow, you must contrive to make yourself more explicit. Who—or what—has put you out? Are you bringing a distinct charge against anybody, may I inquire, or are you merely indulging in vague, general denunciation?

HILARY.

I bring a distinct charge.

FILMER.

[*Seating himself in the chair behind the settee on the left.*] I wish you would formulate it clearly, then.

HILARY.

A distinct charge. I charge these people with malice. I charge them—as she, herself, has already charged them—with a jealous hatred of the girl you have married. I charge them with pursuing—deliberately pursuing—a system of pitiless persecution of Nina.

FILMER.

[*Straightening his back.*] These people being ——?

HILARY.

The Ridgeleys. Oh, I don't care a rap whether or not they are self-deceivers, whether or not theirs is an unconscious hypocrisy. Because they hug themselves with a belief in their own righteousness, they are the more pernicious. I'd wipe out the whole class to which these Ridgeleys belong, Filmer—exterminate it ruthlessly. It's a class that brings everything that's good in the world—virtue, and charity, and religion—into odium and contempt. Its members, individually and collectively, are the pests of humanity.

FILMER.

[*Holding up a hand.*] Pray, pray —— !

HILARY.

[*Rising and coming to FILMER.*] And I charge you with abetting the Ridgeleys—tacitly abetting them—in their treatment of this girl. I charge you with harboring people in your home—which is hers—who you *know* despise her, and who are constantly wounding and humiliating her. Yes, you know it ; and wince under it ; and occasionally, in a half-hearted fashion, try to shield her. So you've not even the excuse of ignorance. And what's your plea of justification ? You find her wanting. You find her wanting in qualities you've no right to demand in her ; qualities, to some minds, less admirable than those she's endowed with. Therefore you break your bargain with her—the bargain every man enters into with the woman he marries ; and you *cheat* her—[FILMER *rises*] cheat her of the protection and comfort which are her due. You find her wanting ! Well, I find *you* wanting. I find you wanting in dignity, and manliness, and independence. And I raise my voice against what I see going on here ; I protest against it with all the strength that's in me ; I protest against it ; oppose it ; forbid it !

[*Bringing his fist down heavily upon the table, he resumes his seat.*]

FILMER.

[*After a pause.*] For the first time in my remembrance, Hilary, you a little exceed the privileges of a brother.

HILARY.

[*Shortly.*] Forgive me.

FILMER.

But we will avoid anything approaching a quarrel, if you please. At any rate, *I* will not contribute to it. [*In his parliamentary manner.*] The—er—the numerous counts of your indictment may be separated into two groups—the first, as I understand, is directed against the family of the Ridgeleys *en bloc*; the second, against myself. I might dismiss both attacks with the observation that they partake too much of the nature of violent invective to admit of a moderate reply. But I won't do that; I will begin by asking you whether you are under the impression that the entire Ridgeley family lives under my roof?

HILARY.

Yes.

FILMER.

Yes!

HILARY.

Yes. Its spirit dominates your household in the person of Geraldine. The others come and go; she remains. I say that as long as her influence is upon you, and on your surroundings, you are, in effect, swayed and controlled by the lot of 'em. [*Relaxing.*] Filmer, I'm sorry I broke out just now. For God's sake, old man, send this lady to the right-about.

FILMER.

Impossible.

HILARY.

Impossible ?

FILMER.

Impracticable—utterly impracticable. [*Constrainedly.*] I—I own that there are moments when Sir Daniel and Lady Ridgeley, and Pryce, jar upon me slightly. To own that is not to join in your virulent disparagement of them. But Geraldine! That's another matter. I did deprive myself of her services once—when I remarried—and the recollection of the chaos that ensued is a nightmare to me to this hour.

HILARY.

Replace her, then, if needs be ; replace her.

FILMER.

Replace Geraldine! By whom, in heaven's name ? [*Walking away to the fireplace.*] My dear Hilary, this discussion is extremely painful ; let us close it. Finally, I regard Miss Ridgeley as indispensable to me ; absolutely indispensable.

HILARY.

[*Rising.*] Finally ?

FILMER.

[*His back to the fire.*] Finally. As to the second part of your indictment—that devoted to myself—permit me to reserve my defense for an occasion when you are less heated. Besides, I am in no hurry, I assure you—in view of dear Nina's present amenable mood—to recapitulate her many regrettable deficiencies.

HILARY.

[*Quietly, but with a strange look.*] Deficiencies !

FILMER.

Deficiencies, poor child, in character and capacity. It

would be most ungrateful of me to do so to-day, most ungracious. Shall we choose another topic—[*looking at his watch*] or would you prefer to walk?

[*There is a brief silence, during which FILMER doesn't stir. Then, deliberately, he takes from his breast-pocket MAUREWARDE'S letters to ANNABEL.*]

HILARY.

[*In a low, firm voice.*] Filmer. [FILMER comes to him with raised eyebrows.] The little bag that Derek brought to you this morning—that little bag —

FILMER.

Yes?

HILARY.

The boy explained, I suppose —?

FILMER.

Yes. It was Annabel's.

HILARY.

[*Nodding.*] Annabel's.

FILMER.

How it came to be in the place where he found it, I can't conjecture.

HILARY.

These letters were in it.

FILMER.

Letters? Derek didn't tell me —

HILARY.

He didn't know—*doesn't* know. He left the bag lying on that table and, while his back was turned, Nina opened it.

FILMER.

What letters are they?

HILARY.

Letters from Maurewarde.

FILMER.

From Guy?

HILARY.

[*Not parting with the letters.*] From Maurewarde.
[*Slowly.*] I've kicked him out. The telegram from town
was a fiction. I've kicked him out.

FILMER.

[*Bewildered—pointing to the letters.*] Because of—
something —?

HILARY.

Because of these—horrible —

FILMER.

Horrible —?

HILARY.

[*Suddenly putting his arm round FILMER.*] My dear,
dear old brother! [*Releasing him and giving him the
letters.*] They were written by Maurewarde to your late
wife.

FILMER.

To—to Annabel?

HILARY.

[*Raising his hands solemnly and then dropping them.*]
To—Annabel.
[*The men stand looking at each other for a moment*

without speaking; then HILARY moves away to the escritoire and sits there, his back to FILMER. FILMER reads one of the letters.

FILMER.

[With an almost expressionless face.] This—this—is a forgery. This is a transparent forgery.

[He sits in the chair behind the settee on the left and reads another letter.

FILMER.

These are—these are forgeries. It's a base trick—a conspiracy—a—a foul——

[He begins to read another letter. In the middle of it, he looks up abruptly and stares before him. Then he starts to his feet and goes to HILARY unsteadily.

FILMER.

Maurewarde——! Maurewarde——! *[Gripping HILARY'S arm.]* What—what did Maurewarde say? *[Shouting.]* I want to hear what Maurewarde said! Maurewarde!

HILARY.

[Turning to him—quietly.] I kicked him out. He'll leave the country. He let me kick him out.

[FILMER attempts to resume his reading of the letters, but fails. Ultimately he gets to the settee facing the fire, and there collapses. HILARY rises and comes to the chair behind the settee.

HILARY.

[After he has seated himself—gently.] Well, there's the living. Do you remember the words Nina used to me this morning, when we three were together here? "The living have claims as well as the dead." It's the living that you must think of, from this time forward. You

have to do justice to the living now ; make amends to the living.

FILMER.

[*Brokenly.*] Nina . . . ? The—the letters . . . ?
When—when did she . . . ?

HILARY.

About half-an-hour before we started for the park. She consulted me, and we agreed as to the course to be followed.

FILMER.

She—she gave them to you ?

HILARY.

To destroy. I should have burned them this afternoon, up-stairs, in my room. [*As if in defense of himself.*] But there's the living ! How could things be allowed to go on as they are going ! How *could* they !

FILMER.

She—she won't — ?

HILARY.

No. She'll forget that she's read 'em. Your first wife's memory will never suffer from any act of Nina's. Make your mind easy on that score. You may depend on Nina implicitly.

FILMER.

[*Almost inaudibly.*] That—that —

HILARY.

What ?

FILMER.

[*Partly raising himself.*] That—that—that's kind of her.

HILARY.

Isn't it? [*Laying his hand on FILMER's shoulder.*] Deficiencies you say she has? She *may* have deficiencies—have we none?—but I believe her to be one of the finest creatures on God's earth. And at this moment—misunderstood, underrated, wronged; and with the power of bringing her enemies to her feet, if she chose to exert it—she's humbling herself still further to these people. Method, system, regularity! A fetich! They are becoming your aim in life instead of an accessory. Your house in order! Filmer, you've *had* your house in order—compare the worth of it with what you possess in this girl.

[*The double-door opens, and LADY RIDGELEY and SIR DANIEL enter with NINA in attendance. LADY RIDGELEY and NINA are wearing garden-hats, and the former has a lace shawl over her shoulders. SIR DANIEL is carrying a small tortoise-shell cigarette-case. HILARY rises as they enter, but FILMER—whose presence is not noticed—makes no movement. The double-door remains open.*]

LADY RIDGELEY.

[*In explanation of her appearance.*] A shower.

SIR DANIEL.

[*Gemially.*] An April shower.

LADY RIDGELEY.

I should be glad to see a continuation of wet now.

SIR DANIEL.

Yes; it would benefit the grass in the park.

LADY RIDGELEY.

[*Sitting, on the left of the oblong table.*] And put a stop to rowdyism and holiday-making.

NINA.

[*At LADY RIDGELEY's side.*] May I take your hat and shawl?

LADY RIDGELEY.

Thank you. [*NINA removes LADY RIDGELEY's hat and takes the shawl from her shoulders.*] Don't catch the lace in the chair.

SIR DANIEL.

[*Coming between NINA and LADY RIDGELEY—playfully, holding up the cigarette-case.*] And who is to be the owner of this pretty thing?

LADY RIDGELEY.

[*Searching for her pocket.*] Give it to me.

NINA.

[*Quickly.*] Oh, no, Lady Ridgeley. I'll divide my cigarettes among the gardeners willingly ; but, please, I want my case.

HILARY.

[*Advancing—to NINA.*] Yours?

NINA.

[*To HILARY, piteously.*] I left my cigarette-case in the summer-house yesterday.

SIR DANIEL.

[*Examining the case.*] I happened to sit down upon it a few minutes ago.

LADY RIDGELEY.

[*To HILARY.*] We have succeeded—Sir Daniel and I—in extracting a promise from Nina that she will break herself of the objectionable habit.

HILARY.

Of smoking?

SIR DANIEL.

Of smoking.

LADY RIDGELEY.

So unladylike—worse, so unwomanly.

SIR DANIEL.

Degrading. In a man it's deplorable enough, carried to excess.

LADY RIDGELEY.

[*Anxiously.*] Dan——

SIR DANIEL.

Eh?

LADY RIDGELEY.

Has it struck you that our Pryce has been smoking too many cigars lately?

SIR DANIEL.

It *has*. Heaven forbid that I should find the smallest fault in one of my own children—but it *has*.

[*LADY RIDGELEY, having found her pocket, now holds out her hand for the cigarette-case.*]

NINA.

[*Touching SIR DANIEL's arm.*] No, no! Sir Daniel! That was a gift from my father.

SIR DANIEL.

From your father!

LADY RIDGELEY.

A clergyman!

NINA.

He always smoked a pipe after supper in his study ——

LADY RIDGELEY.

A pipe !

SIR DANIEL.

A pipe !

NINA.

[*To HILARY, appealingly.*] And I used to sit opposite to him—we were great friends —— ! [*To SIR DANIEL.*] Sir Daniel —— !

SIR DANIEL.

[*Shaking his head.*] A strange clergyman.

LADY RIDGELEY.

A strange parent.

HILARY.

[*Pointing to the cigarette-case.*] May I look at it ?

[*SIR DANIEL surrenders the cigarette-case to NINA, who passes it to HILARY. LADY RIDGELEY sniffs disapprovingly.*]

HILARY.

[*To NINA.*] Mrs. Nina, in my den at Montiago I've a collection of odds and ends—souvenirs, mementos, reminders of hours gaily spent, profitably spent, ill spent.

LADY RIDGELEY.

Ah !

HILARY.

It's a quaint museum. Paintings, sketches, curiosities of every description, old ball-room trophies—a shoe, a glove, a fan or two —— !

SIR DANIEL.

Tsch, tsch, tsch !

HILARY.

The blood-stained handkerchief of a matador, and a cigarette, half-smoked, which has been pressed by the lips of an Empress !

LADY RIDGELEY.

Good gracious !

HILARY.

My treasures speak to me of friendships made all over the world—Madrid, Paris, Constantinople, Vienna, Sofia, Bucharest, Tokio, Washington, and elsewhere ; and I should like to add one more voice to the babel of tongues. Will you give me this little case ? If you will, I shall place it, apart, beside the remains of the poor Empress's cigarette.

LADY RIDGELEY.

[*Faintly.*] Oh, dear !

HILARY.

She was a woman, Mrs. Nina, who was sorely tried, but who was generous, and patient, and forgiving—who was, in fact, one of the noblest of her sex. So you would be in good company.

[*While HILARY is speaking, GERALDINE and PRYCE appear in the outer hall, coming from the right. Attracted by what is going on, they halt in the doorway and listen. As HILARY finishes speaking, they enter quietly. GERALDINE is wearing a garden hat. PRYCE, scowling at HILARY, removes his hat on entering.*]

NINA.

[*To HILARY, after a pause.*] Keep it. [*Raising her eyes to his.*] A souvenir.

[*FILMER rises and faces those in the room.*]

NINA.

[*Surprised, moving to the back of the settee on the left.*]
Filmer——?

SIR DANIEL.

Filmer?

LADY RIDGELEY.

We didn't see you, Filmer.

FILMER.

No, I—I've been sitting—thinking.

SIR DANIEL.

[*Mournfully.*] Thinking.

LADY RIDGELEY.

[*Sighing.*] Ah!

SIR DANIEL.

[*Discovering GERALDINE and PRYCE.*] Oh, are you there, my dears?

FILMER.

[*Who has come forward, putting his words together with difficulty.*] I—I am glad you are all here—because I—I've something to say to you—to say ——

SIR DANIEL.

Ah? H'm?

FILMER.

It relates to—Annabel.

LADY RIDGELEY.

[*In a murmur.*] Dear Filmer.

FILMER.

And to Nina. To-day we—we have honored the dead. We have discharged a debt—so far as such a debt can be discharged—to the dead. And now—there is the living—the living——

LADY RIDGELEY.

The living?

[*HILARY moves to FILMER'S side. NINA stares at FILMER in wonderment.*]

FILMER.

[*Steadying himself by grasping HILARY'S arm.*] By the living, I mean—especially—Nina. For reasons known to you, she has stood aside during the greater part of our short married life. From to-day those reasons cease to have weight with me. [*NINA sits.*] I have been—thinking. Order, method, regularity, natural to Annabel, are not easy to Nina. Nina may acquire them, or she may not. But whether she acquires them, or whether she does not, it is her right that she should be mistress of my house. [*To the RIDGELEYS.*] I thank you—thank you all—for the help you have given me. My obligation to Geraldine is indeed deep. Let us—my wife and I—let us often welcome you—here and in London—as our guests.

[*There is a pause, and then SIR DANIEL shakes FILMER by the hand.*]

SIR DANIEL.

I—we—we quite understand. Very, very proper—eh, Harriet?—very, very proper.

LADY RIDGELEY.

[*Itchy.*] Very, very. There was no necessity for hesitation—no necessity whatever. If Filmer—if Filmer——

SIR DANIEL.

I—er—I'll go up-stairs and have my nap, Harriet.

LADY RIDGELEY.

[*Rising.*] I'll come with you.

SIR DANIEL.

[*Moving to the door—thoughtfully.*] My nap—my nap——

LADY RIDGELEY.

[*Following SIR DANIEL—to GERALDINE.*] Are you doing anything, Geraldine?

GERALDINE.

[*With a slight shrug.*] No, mother; I've nothing to do.

LADY RIDGELEY.

I wish you would explain that embroidery stitch to me again.

[SIR DANIEL, LADY RIDGELEY and GERALDINE pass through the outer hall and disappear on the left.

PRYCE.

[*Taking a cigar from his case.*] The shower's over. Shame to stick indoors.

[*He puts the cigar in his mouth and his hat on his head, and also disappears, following his people. FILMER sits in the chair on the left of the oblong table. MAUREWARDE'S letters are crushed up in his hand. He now begins to smooth them out upon his knee. NINA rises and approaches him timidly.*

NINA.

Filmer —

FILMER.

Yes, Nina?

NINA.

[*Seeing the letters.*] Ah — ! [*Turning to HILARY.*]
You—you've told him—you've given them to him — !

HILARY.

[*Nodding.*] Yes.

NINA.

[*Under her breath.*] Oh, how cruel of you! [*To FILMER.*] Filmer—Filmer —

[*He allows her to take the letters from him, and she crosses to the fireplace. There she burns the letters, one by one.*]

HILARY.

[*To FILMER, gently.*] That was splendid—splendid.

FILMER.

[*In a whisper.*] Hilary —

HILARY.

Eh?

FILMER.

Annabel—so systematic—so methodical! And yet—she neglected to burn Maurewarde's letters!

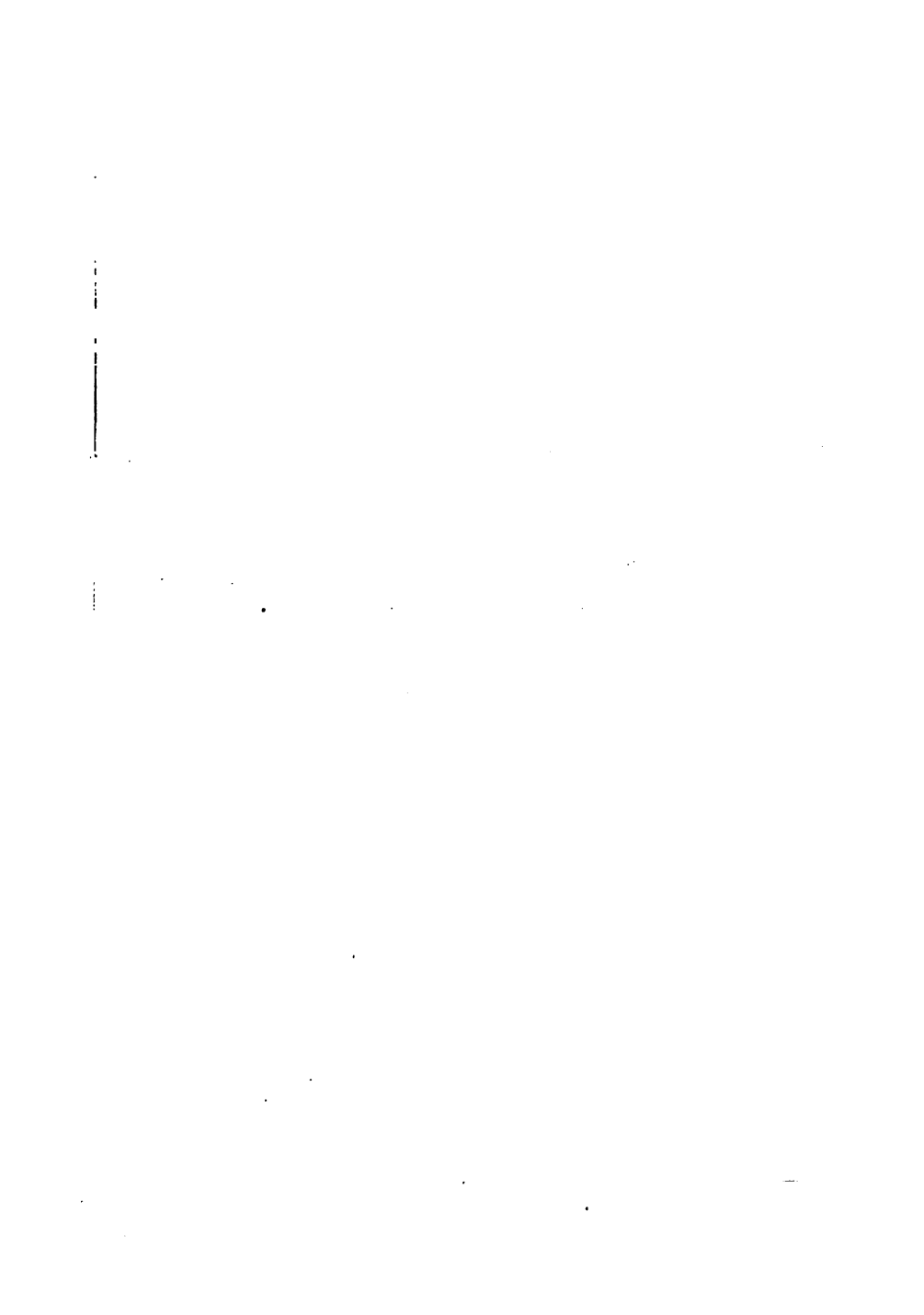
HILARY.

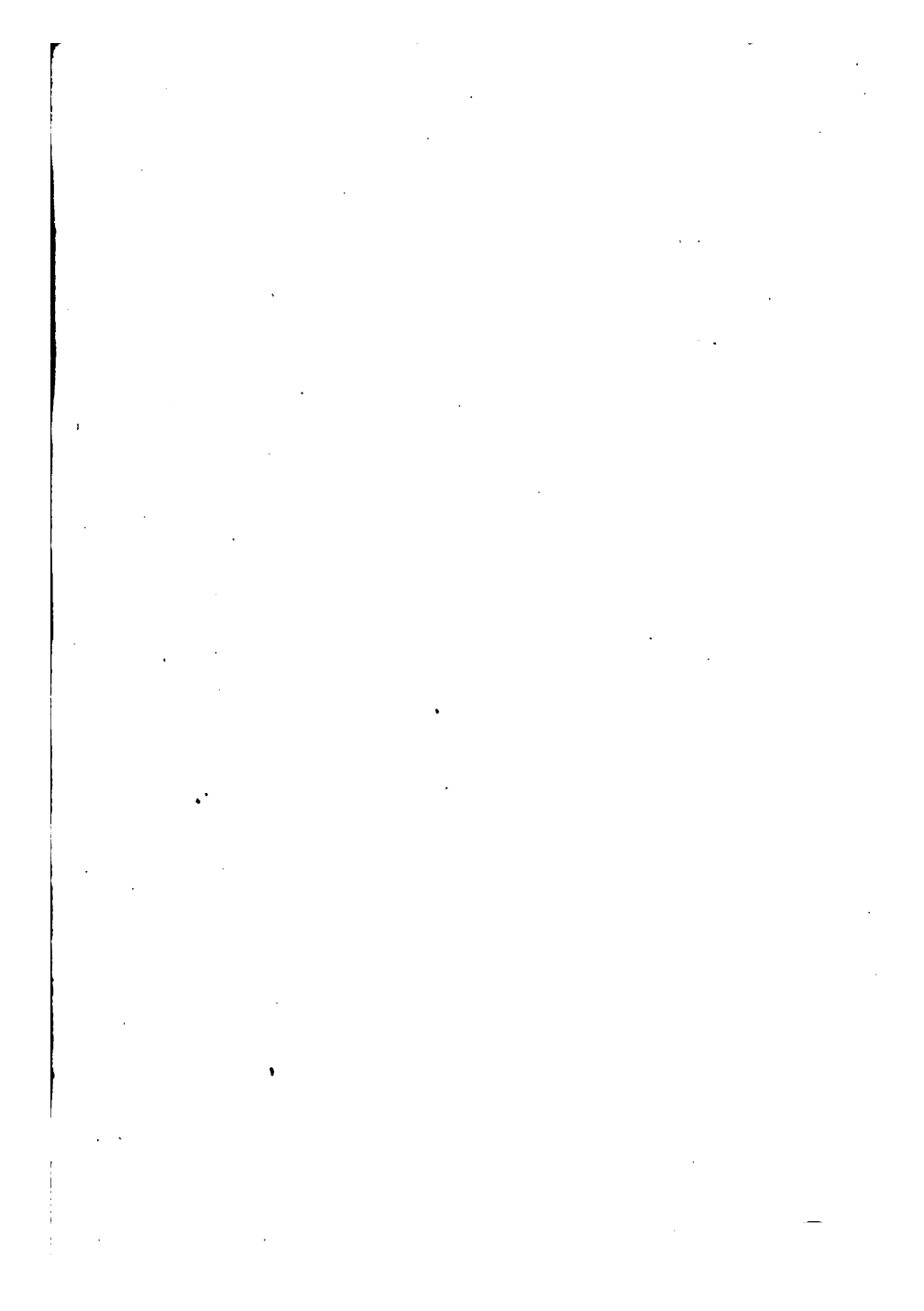
My dear chap, you *see*! Every system has its breaking-point, when we apply it to ourselves. A Lord Chancellor has been known to bungle in making his own Will.

[*Pointing to the light in the grate.*] They're burned at last, though.

[*NINA is now sitting upon the settle, gazing at the blaze. FILMER rises and goes to her slowly, and seats himself beside her. Then HILARY withdraws—looking at them lingeringly as he closes the door upon them.*

THE END





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